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ARIFURETA SHOKUGYOU DE SEKAISAIKYOU
世界最強
OVERLAP

Arifureta Shokugyou de Sekai Saikyou

Volume 1

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Chapter 0 : Prologue

In the darkness, the light quickly disappears. Even unconscious the hand reached out to grasp at nothing, while falling there was a sense of tightening in the nether region. Nagumo Hajime's face distorted with fear as the light disappeared from his vision.

Currently, Hajime was falling down a deep cliff that looked like the entrance to hell. The only light visible was the light that illuminated the ground above. As he continued to fall the light no longer reached him, the surrounding turned black, Hajime searched the dungeon, and on the cervices of the sides he saw a revolving lantern as the sound of wind passed by him.

Being a Japanese myself, the inequality that he tasted when he came to this world was too hard to represent in words and the hope that this fantasy world would rid of it, the current history of the misfortune that he tasted in progressive form.

* * *

Monday, the most melancholy of all the days has just started. For most people, at this time of the week would sigh, while the previous day would be heaven to them.

And Nagumo Hajime was not an exception to this notion. However, in Hajime's case, it was not just a simple bother, the cozy school was associated with a very bad feeling, probably because he was depressed. As always, when the last bell chimed at school, he opened the door to the classroom with his tired body from pulling an all-nighter.

At that moment, Hajime received glares and clicking of tongues from the majority of the male students in the classroom. The girls did not have a friendly expression either. It was fine if the people were indifferent, but there were those who had an expression of contempt directed at him.

Hajime tried to play it off as he headed to his seat, but there was always people who would mess with him every time.

“Hey Kimoota*! Did you play games all night again? Was it an eroge I wonder?”

“Uwa, gross. Staying up all night to play eroge is super disgusting.”

What the heck do they find funny to guffaw at? The laughter came from Hiyama Daisuke. He is the leader of the students that pick on Hajime on a daily routine. The three next to him with the stupid laugh were Saito Yoshiki, Kondo Reiichi, and Nakano Shinji, these four were the ones that picked on Hajime the most frequently.

As Hiyama stated, Hajime was an otaku. Hajime’s appearance and behavior was not that bad to be called Kimoota or to be ridiculed. His hair was trimmed short and he did not have bedhead hair. He did not have an assertive personality but that did not mean he was anti-social, besides he clearly replied back to people. He was quiet, but he did not give off a feeling of creepiness. Hajime simply liked things like manga, light novels, games, and movies.

The criticism that otaku’s receive from society is certainly strong, generally speaking the degree of ridicule varies but it never reaches open hostility. Yet, why does all the male students show unrestrained contempt and hostility?

The answer was a girl.

“Nagumo-kun, Good Morning! Almost late as usually, you should come earlier.”

The girl walks up to Hajime as she is smiling. In this class, no wait this whole school, she is one of the few exceptions that treated Hajime friendly.

Her name was Shirasaki Kaori. She is known as one of the two goddesses of the school, popular among both male and female students and known for her very beautiful looks. Kaori had long glossy black hair that reached her waist, and large slightly weeping eyes that conveyed a sense of gentleness. She had a straight bridge nose that was small, and thin lips of Sakura colors arranged to perfection.

Always the girl with the endless smile, is very caring and has a strong sense of responsibility that often people, regardless of school year, rely on her help. She is always seen with a sincere expression without any unpleasantness, that is why it is hard to believe she was just a high school student.

So, why does someone like Kaori treat Hajime so well? This has caused many sleepless nights for Hajime and the student body (He got average grades as a result), it was thought that it was because of Kaori's good nature that warranted the treatment.

Now, Hajime's class attitude should improve, if Kaori was dealing with an Ikemen than it would have been acceptable, unfortunately, Hajime was very ordinary, on hand his reputation for "a life of hobbies" did not see an improvement of the attitude against him. That such a person as Hajime can be so friendly with Kaori, the ordinary male students could not stand it. Often they think "Why is it only him?" The female students simply, because they believe Hajime is taking advantage of Kaori's kind nature, seem to be uncomfortable with him.

"Ah, Good Morning Shirasaki-san."

Uwa, is this Saki?! Is what he wanted to say, but he saw the glint of the eyes and just contorted his face in discomfort as he returned the greeting.

And Kaori just wore a joyful expression. Why does she have such an expression? Furthermore the glaze was so piercing that he could feel the flow of cold sweat. Hajime wondered every single time. Why does someone like Kaori, who is hailed as the most beautiful in the school, associate herself with him. In Hajime's eyes, there is just something about Kaori's nature that he did not think about yet.

However, he was not going to flatter himself thinking that it was romantic feelings. Hajime himself, had given up self-awareness in his pursuit of his hobbies. Because of his lack of self-awareness his looks were average and so was his athletic ability. So when you compared him to her, he was nowhere close to being good enough. Therefore, her attitude is a mystery.

Besides that, can you be a little more aware of the Saki storm brewing! I say in my innermost thoughts. If I had voiced it, I have no doubt that someone would take me behind the gym…

When I attempted to end the conversation there, three students got closer to us.

“Nagumo-kun, Good Morning. It’s troublesome every day.”

“Kaori, are you looking after him again? Really, Kaori is really kind.”

“For real, no matter what you say to this unmotivated guy, it won’t work.”

The name of the girl that greeted him, from the three, is Yaegashi Shizuku. Kaori’s best friend. Her trademark was her long black hair done in a ponytail. Her slightly slit eyes was sharp, but in the depths there is a feeling of softness, this gives her the impression of being cool rather than cold. She was tall for a girl at 172 cm, her posture and physique was very dignify and it was similar to how a samurai was.

In fact, her family is in ownership of a Kenjutsu dojo. Shizuku herself is a vetran of her family style. Since she was a child, she had never lost in a tournament. Currently she appears in magazines as the “Beautiful Swordwoman”, she even have some diehard fans.

The underclasswomen would call her “Onee-sama” because of their admiration.

Next, the one that spoke a little clumsily to Kaori was Amanogawa Kouki. Just like his name he was the perfect man, good looks, athletic, smart, and good personality. He had silky brown hair and gentle eyes. His body was toned and slender at about 180 cm. Kouki was nice to everyone and had a very strong sense of justice. Since he was small he attended the Yaegashi Kenjutsu dojo. Like Shizuku, he was a national level athlete. Shizuku and him are childhood friends. Dozens of girls have fallen for him, but he is always close to Kaori and Shizuku so the other girls are hesitant to confess their feelings. Still he is a very popular guy that gets confessed to at least

twice a month from all over.

The last person was a male with a very reckless feeling named Sakagami Ryutaro, Kouki's best friend. He is muscle brain that does not care about the finer details in things. His physique is like a bear and he stand tall at about 190 cm. The eyes he has shows playfulness and sharpness. Ryutaro is a very hot blooded individuals that like others that put in effort like him, he does not like Hajime because of his lackluster approach to life. Even now, he choose to ignore Hajime.

"Ohayo, Yaegashi-san, Tennokawa-kun, Sakagami-kun. Haha, Maa, there is no helping it since it's my own fault."

To their greetings, Hajime just gives a bitter smile. "Teme, What selfish words did you say to Yaegashi-san? Aaa?" I wanted to say but a stare stopped me*. Both the girls were very popular, Shizuku's reputation would not lose to Kaori's.

"If you knew about it, why not fix it? I think you are fawning over Kaori's kindness. Kaori is not just trying to bother you."

Kouki admonishes Hajime. In Kouki's eyes, Hajime is not taking Kaori's kindness with any sincerity. It's not like he wanted to be babied! Rather please just leave me alone! I wanted to argue with him, but there would be more trouble if I did. There was no use in arguing with Kouki because he always felt he was right.

Even if they asked him to "fix" his hobbies, his hobbies was at the center of his life. Because, his father was a game creator and his mother was a shoujo mangaka, in the future he wanted to get a partime job at his father's company or mother's workplace.

He was already practicing his skills, and all his hobbies were perfect for his plans. Hajime did not feel like changing his life style because he had given serious thoughts about it already. If Kaori had not taken an interest in Hajime, he would have lived a quiet student life.

"Iya~Ahaha…"

Therefore, laughingly, Hajime let it go. However, the goddess of unawareness dropped a bomb again like always.

“Kouki-kun, What are you saying? I’m just talking to Nagumo-kun because I want to.”

Zawatto*, the classroom became noisy. The male students glared and clenched their teeth with Saki at that. Hiyama’s group started to consider where they could take Hajime during the lunch break.

“Oh?…Aa, Really, Kaori is so nice.”

Kouki seems to take Kaori’s response about Hajime at face value. Kouki’s was a good person, but he lacked the perception to really understand the meaning of what is being said. Hajime took this time to look up at the sky to escape the awkward situation.

“…Gomenasaine? I don’t want to rude to you two but…”

At that place the person with the best understanding of people, Shizuku, secretly apologized to Hajime. Hajime replied with a “No choice” with a grin and a shrug.

At that time the bell chimed to signal the start of class, as their teacher entered the classroom. The teacher conveyed the usually information. And, Hajime started his daydream, while the class started.

Looking at that Hajime, Kaori smiled, Shizuku just grinned, males were clicking their tongues, girls were directing a gaze of scorn.

* * *

I returned to consciousness at the feeling of the class’s bustle. Since it was a habitual sleep, he had a timing of when to wake up. The kind of feeling he got, signify that it was lunch break.

Hajime raises his face from the desk and takes out his basic lunch with a rustling sound. Looking around the people who were buying food were already out the class, so the number of people in class were decreasing. Still, there were still about 2/3 of the class with their bento left, while their 4th period social studies teacher

Hatakeyama Aiko (25 years old) was chatting with several students near the podium.

Ji~yururu, ki~yupon!

Immediately, Hajime tried to take a nap after eating his lunch. However, a certain goddess would not all it, for Hajime she was the devil, smiled as she approached his desk.

Hajime inwardly moaned “Damn!” He seemed to be especially sleepy on Mondays. Usually before Kaori’s and the other interacted with him, he would have been gone to find a place to sleep, but those two days of all nighters had taken a toll on him.

“Nagumo-kun, how rare it is to find you in class at lunch. Obento? If you want let’s eat together.”

Once again, a disturbing atmosphere filled the classroom, Hajime scream in his heart. No, who do you pay attention to me now? Without meaning to, an unknown dialect almost escaped from his mouth. Hajime tried to refuse.

“Ah, thanks for the offer, Shirasaki-san. However, I have already finished eating so why not join the others?”

As I said that, I showed her my empty lunch pack that was completely gone. To refuse such an offer people would think “Who is this guy?”, but it’s better than the constant nagging he would get.

However, such a low level refusal was not enough to stop the Goddess from trying.

“Eh! You only ate that much? That’s not good, you should eat properly. I’ll give you some of mine!”

(Give me a break! Notice it! Notice the atmosphere!)

Suddenly my saviors appeared, when I started to produce a cold sweat from the increasing pressure. It was Kouki’s group.

“Kaori. Let’s eat together. It seems like Nagumo hasn’t slept enough yet. I won’t allow such a sleepyhead to enjoy Kaori’s delicious

meal.”

Kaori just laughs refreshingly at Kouki’s smug response. For someone as insensitive as Kaori, an Ikemen’s smile and words had no effect on her.

“Eh? What are you unable to allow?”

Shizuku unwittingly blew out a laugh at Kaori’s response. Kouki just laughs at that and starts to just chat it up. Still 4 of the most famous students were gathered around Hajime’s desk and that did not allow the glares to weaken.

Hajime complained to himself and let out a sigh.

(Already, these guys are in their own worlds. No matter how you look at these 4, they are caught up in their own atmosphere. Please someone from another world summon him.)

Hajime tries to escape reality. When he was about to moving away he was frozen.

In front of his eyes, a complex array of snow white circles appeared before him. The students also noticed this weird phenomenon. He watched as the patterns shined and the force that held him started to hold the other students, he thought it was a magic formation.

The magic formation got gradually brighter and soon expanded to the size of the whole classroom. When the students finally processed the situation they tried to move and scream. When the formation started to shine, Aiko-sensei shouted “Everybody get out”, but at this instance the formation exploded.

The light covered the classroom for a few seconds, then a few minutes. When it cleared no one was left in the classroom. The classroom was devoid of human life but all their belongings, that were not on them, were left behind.

The world would later call this a Spirited Away incident, but that is for another time.

Chapter 1 : Summoned to a Different World

Template summons.

* * *

Hajime stood there with his hands protecting his face and his eyes closed, but when he heard the rustling noise he slowly opened his eyes.

Hajime looked around in utter amazement. The first thing to catch his eyes was a huge mural. The mural was about 10 meters in height, there was a person with androgynous features that had an aureole in the back and long flowing blonde hair with a slight smile on the mural. A grassy plain, a lake, and mountains are drawn in the background and the person had both of their hands extended out. It is a beautiful mural. It is a great mural. However, Hajime felt that the eyes were somewhat cold.

When he looked around, he noticed that they were in a huge hall. He wondered if the whole hall was made of marble. The whole building was done with a smooth white luster, it had huge pillars that was carved beautifully holding it up, and the ceiling was done in a dome shape. The whole place looked like a cathedral and the hall had a very solemn atmosphere.

It seemed that Hajime and the rest were at the top of a pedestal that was located in the deepest part of the building. They were in a position higher than the surrounding area. His classmates also looked around stunned at what they were seeing. Apparently, all that students that were present in the classroom at that time, was caught up in the situation.

Hajime glanced behind. There was Kaori also looking around stunned at was before them. She did not seem to be injured, so Hajime felt relief.

Perhaps, the people that were surrounding the pedestal would be

able to explain the situation. Yeah, Hajime and his classmates were not the only ones here. There were at least 30 people on their knees giving prayer with both their hands in front of their chest. All of them wore a white robe that was embroidered with gold, and they had a staff right next to them. At the tip of the staves it spread out like a fan, and several pieces of disks hung around it in a circle.

One particular priest looked to be about 70 years old, what made him stand out was his very formal headwear that was close to 30 cm in height, stepped forward towards them. Though with his old age, he was wearing too flashy of a robe. He might have passed for someone in his 50s if not for the wrinkles that engraved his face.

The old priest spoke to them with a clear and calming voice that fit his appearance, with the staff in his hand.

“Welcome to Tortus, our Hero and his fellow countrymen. We welcome you all. I am called Ishtar Lombard and I am the Pope of the Church of Saints. Please let’s get along.”

After he introduced himself, he presented a smile that was often associated with nice elderly people.

* * *

Currently, Hajime and the rest moved locations, they had passed through the great hall and saw some tables lined up 10 meters in front of them. Without exception this room was made with gorgeous details. From a layman’s perspective, it seemed like all the works that decorated the room was made with masterful technique. Probably this was where they were going to eat. Kouki’s group of 4 and Aiko-sensei sat at the head of the table. Hajime sat at the last spot.

Nobody made any noise as they were guided to this area and seated, their minds were still trying to work out what happened to them. It was up to Ishtar to explain the situation, even Kouki with his EX Charisma was silently wondering. Aiko-sensei gathered the students like a teacher should, with teary eyes.

When everyone was seated, with amazing timing, the maids entered

pushing carts. Yeah, real maids! Not like those fat Obaa-sans maids that plagued the earth. These were real and true beautiful woman, beautiful women maids that embodied the dreams of a man.

The majority of the class boys stared at the maids because of their adolescent minds. Though the girls were sending cold glares at them.

Hajime instinctively stares at the maid that comes by his side to serve the drinks…but for some reason he felt a chill down his spine and he fixed his staring. When he faced the direction of the chill, Hajime saw Kaori smiling at him. Hajime decided to stop looking.

Ishtar started his explanation after he confirmed that everyone had gotten a drink.

“I’m sure you are all confused. I will explain first, so please listen till the end before asking any questions.”

After that, Ishtar arbitrarily explained the situation and it seemed like a fantasy.

In summary.

First, the world was called Tortus. In this world, there were three major races. Humans, Devils, and demi-humans. The Humans ruled over the north area. The Devils ruled over the south area. The demi-humans lived quietly in the wilderness to the east.

Of these, the Humans and Devils have been in a war for several hundred years. When compared a Devil was much stronger than a Human but Humans had the number advantage. Both sides have not been in a large-scale war in a few decades, but they are preparing themselves. Recently there has been abnormal happenings occurring. The deployment of monsters by the Devils.

Monsters are said to be a variant of wild animals that took in magic and changed. They were not considered real living organisms. They had the power to mimic peculiar magic that other races used, and this made them powerful and dangerous animals.

Until now there were very few people that could tame them. Even if

they could be tamed, the tamer could only control 1 or 2 monsters at most. This common thought was completely reversed by the Devils. This meant that the Humans no longer had their number advantage. Now the Human race was facing a crisis.

“The one to have summoned you here is Eht-sama. He is the god that protect us and the one we worship in the Church of Saints. He is the one that created this world. Most likely Eht-sama realized that if things remained this way the Humans would face destruction. For this reason you were summoned to avoid this future. The world you come from is higher ranked than ours, the people from your world would have exceptional power here. Before the summon, we prayed to Eht-sama. You were the “salvation” that he sent.

With your powers, we will overthrow the Devils and save the Humans by the will of Eht-sama.”

Ishtar said this with a very rapt expression. He was most likely recalling what the oracle had told him. More than 90% of Humans followed the teachings of the Church, those who have heard the oracle is often assigned to a position of power.

Hajime suspected this so called “Will of God”. He felt that Ishtar was distorting what the world really was and what it faced. People that wanted to protest suddenly appeared. It was Aiko-sensei.

“Please don’t joke around! In the end, these children will be fighting in a war! I won’t allow such a thing! I will absolutely not allow such a thing! Please let us return! Surely, their families will be worried about them! What you have done is merely kidnapping!”

Aiko-sensei was angry. She was a very popular social studies teacher that was 25 years old. She had a baby like face with her 150 cm height. Her hair was done in a bob cut. For her student’s sake she tried her best and it was very heartwarming. There was often times when the students were protected by her even though her physique was not that adult like.

The students often called her Ai-chan, even if she got angry when they referred to her as such. She was aiming to be a dignified

teacher.

She was angered at the unreasonable summoning and stood up against it. Ah, Ai-chan is trying her best again. There were students who were looking at Aiko-sensei's admonishment of Ishtar with a fuzzy feeling. The following words from Ishtar froze them.

"I sympathize with your feelings. Unfortunately we have no way to return you."

Silence filled the halls. There was a cold air that appeared throughout the whole area. Everyone gaze at Ishtar, not knowing what to say to that.

"That's impossible, what do you mean not possible? If you can summon us, you can send us back!"

Aiko-sensei shouted out.

"As I said earlier, it was Eht-sama that summoned you. The magic that interferes with other worlds is a magic we humans cannot use. Whether or not you can return it is left up to Eht-sama to decide."

"Such a thing…"

Aiko-sensei lost her strength at that point and dropped into her chair like a stone. The students started to rustle at that.

"Lies! Why can't we return?"

"Iyaa. I just want to return!"

"Don't even joke about war! Don't mess with me!"

"Why, Why, Why…"

The students started to panic at the situation. Even Hajime was not okay with this. However, being an Otaku he had read many situations like this before. Therefore, he expected these patterns. Since it was not the worst pattern, he was a lot calmer than the other students. Incidentally one of the worst pattern was being summoned to be a slave.

While everyone was taken off guard, Ishtar was just calming watching the students' reactions and choose to let it flow naturally. However, Hajime could see that behind that calm expression there was contempt for them. The priest was probably thinking that they should be honored to be picked by Eht-sama.

Still, the panic did not settle down. Kouki at this moment stood up and slam the table with a bang. This sound surprised the students and got their attention. When he confirmed that he had everyone's attention, Kouki began to talk.

"Everyone, there is no reason to make so much noise in front of Ishtar-san. He had nothing to do with it. …Me, I'm going to fight. The humans of this world are facing a crisis, that is a fact. Knowing that, I cannot ignore their pleas for help. If I was summoned to save humans, we may be able to return after we have saved them. Ishtar-san, how about it?"

"Right, Eht-sama will answer the wishes of the Saviors."

"We all have special powers right? Since I came here I've been feeling this sense of power."

"Yes, that's right. Roughly, each of you have power that is several times higher than the people from this world."

"Then it's okay. I'll fight. I'll save the people, and then we can all go home. I'll save the world and everyone, you'll see!"

Kouki gripped his fist tightly as he declared this. Vainly, Kouki showed his bright smile that sparkled. At this moment, there was no doubt that his EX charisma was very effective. The students that earlier had an expression of despair began to regain calmness and vigor. Kouki's eyes that shined so brightly, seemed to have found hope in this situation. Half of the school girls sent admiring glances at him.

"I thought you would say something like that. If you were to do it alone, I would worry about you. I'll also fight."

"Ryutaro"

“At this moment that is all we can do. It’s not like I hate it, I’ll fight too.”

“Shizuku”

“Eh, If Shizuku-chan is going, I’ll try my best.”

“Kaori.”

The usual group of 4 agree with Kaori. The rest of the classmates seem to approve and went with the flow. Aiko-sensei tried to argue against it with watery eyes, but against Kouki’s display it was useless.

After all, it seemed that everyone was going to participate in the war. Most likely the classmates did not truly understand what it was meant to go to war, they were just fantasizing it. Most likely they agreed as a mechanism to escape the grim reality they were in, or else their spirits might have caved at the surreal situation. Hajime just observed Ishtar while thinking these things. The priest had a very satisfied expression on his face.

Hajime noticed it though. While Ishtar was giving the explanation, he observed Kouki, he confirmed what reaction they would have to the story. With Kouki’s strong sense of justice, it was easy to see his reaction to the tragedy that would befall humans. After he just told them about the ruthlessness of the Devils, Ishtar specifically emphasized the cruelty. Ishtar probably had good insight. He was wondering who had the most influence in the group.

It was probably natural for someone in the world’s largest religion, but what a tricky person. Hajime added Ishtar as someone to be careful of in his head.

* * *

The one waiting for them after the summon was not a priestess or princess, but a really old guy!

Chapter 2 : Status Plate

It's explanation time.

* * *

Since they all agreed to participate in the war, the students would have to learn how to fight. Even if they had a lot of extra power and potential, they were all just regular Japanese high school students that were used to peace. Suddenly fighting monsters and devils would not go well.

However, the church and parties involved had already predicted this circumstance, Ishtar said, this church is located on "God's Mountain" and at the foot is the "Hairihi Kingdom" have arrange for this. The kingdom had a very close relationship with the Church, the god that they worshipped, was the God of Creation Eht and this country was founded by the family of Charm Byrne. The relationship was strong because the church supported this country.

The students went out the front gate of the church. They were going to descend the mountain and visit the Hairihi Kingdom. The church was located at the summit of "God's Mountain". When the majestic church gates opened, there was a sea of clouds there to greet them. Even if it was very high, they did not feel the effects of the high altitude. Maybe it was because the magic made it a more comfortable living environment. They were fascinated with the grand scene of the blue sky, the sparkling sun, and the sea of clouds.

Ishtar urged them to proceed, while boasting about something. Eventually a circular white pedestal surround by fences came into their view. The beautiful corridor was made of the same material as seen in the cathedral they approached the pedestal and rode on it.

On the pedestal, there were huge magic formations carved into it. Because there was a sea of clouds on the other side of the fence, the students gathered in the center restlessly.

Ishtar started to chant.

“The road that leads, opens for the faithful, “Tendou”.”

As soon as he said that, the magic formation started to shine. The pedestal started to move smoothly like it was on a ropeway, it moved diagonally towards the ground. Apparently, the “chant” empowered the magic formation engraved into the pedestal. The pedestal was most likely a ropeway. For the students, seeing magic the first time made them excited. When the pedestal broke into the clouds, it caused an uproar.

Eventually, it passed through the clouds and the ground could be seen. They could see a big town underneath. A huge castle was built into the mountain and the castle town spread from the castle. This was the Hairihi Kingdom. The pedestal lead them to the roof of a very expensive tower that was connected to the royal palace.

Hajime cynically laughed at the production value at display. To descend from the heavens through the sea of clouds, they were being presented as the Chosen of God. They just didn’t present the students in a good light, but also the members of the church.

Hajime remembered the pre-war Japan days. At that time religion and politics were closely tied together. There was a likelihood that it would lead to trouble later on. However, this world may be even more strained. After all, this world had the power to touch other worlds, all the while following the “Will of God”.

The possibility of them returning, all relied on saving the world on the feelings of their god. While looking over the Capital city and its view becoming clearer, Hajime suppressed the uneasiness he felt in his heart. Anyway, he was going to do what he can.

* * *

When they arrived at the Royal Palace, they were ushered into the throne room straight away. They walked through the corridors and could not help but notice the beauty of the decorations. Along the way, they saw someone dressed up like a knight. they also passed by some maids, everyone was fully uniformed. They looked at the students with awe. The students seemed to be popular or known already.

Hajime seemed uncomfortable so he stuck around at the end of the group. They arrived in front of a set of huge double doors that was designed beautifully, two Soldiers stood at attention on both sides of the door when Ishtar and the party came. Without waiting for a reply, they opened the door.

Ishtar just leisurely entered like it was the natural thing to do. Students filed in feeling a little uneasy, with the exception of Kouki.

At that point I entered the doorway too. There was a red carpet that led from the entrance all the way to a luxurious throne. On the throne sat a middle aged man that conveyed ambition and dignity. They all stood before the throne and waited. There was a woman next to the throne, that seemed to be the queen. Next to her was a 10 year old boy with blonde hair and blue eyes. A 15-16 year old Bishoujo was next to him, and there was a small 7-8 year old girl that accompanied her. There were people that looked like civil officers on the right side of the carpet, on the left were what looked like to be military officers.

Arriving in front of the throne, Hajime's group stopped, while Ishtar proceeded next to the King. The King lightly kissed the Pope's hand as a sign of respect. Apparently, the Pope was the top dog here. This just confirmed Hajime's theory that the country was run by "God", he sighed inwardly at that.

From there, they introduced themselves. The King's name was Erihido S. B. Hairihi. Luruaria the Queen, Randell the prince, 1st princess Liliana, and 2nd princess Maribelle. After, the prime minister, Knight commander, and other high status people introduced themselves. It seemed that Kaori's charm was universal because the young prince was gazing admiringly at her.

A banquet was held after and they were able to enjoy this world's cuisine. The appearance of this kingdom was very similar to olden Europeans of Earth. The drink they served was pink in color but glistened like a rainbow, it was very delicious.

The prince seemed to take a liking to Kaori because he was often talking to Kaori, and this got a lot of the class boys fretting. Hajime did not expect much chance for the prince because he was just 10

years old.

In the royal palace, they were introduced to the instructors that would train them. They also would provided shelter, food, and clothing for all of them. The instructors were handpicked from the Knights, Imperial Court Mages, and much more. This would allow them to develop friendships for the forthcoming war.

After they were finished with the dinner, each person was lead to their own room. Hajime was not the only one to be amazed by the bed that had a canopy over it. Hajime was uncomfortable in such a luxurious room. Still the room allowed for all the strain and stress they got today to melt away. He laid on the bed and he slowly drifted off to sleep.

* * *

Training and lectures began the very next day.

First, each of the students were introduced to a silver plate (12cm x 7 cm). The students looked at the plates curiously. Knight Commander Meld Loggins started to explain.

He thought it was good to have a constant attendance for training, he did not seem to be able to leave it to the students to clear up their mess. Besides Meld, there was the Deputy Leader, who just laughed and said it was going to be alright. Well the Deputy leader may be alright.

“Yoshi, did everyone get one? These plates are called Status Plates. Literally, these plates will show your stats and status. The plate also serves as an identification card. As long as you have this, you cannot get lost, so don’t lose it.”

Meld had a very carefree way of speaking. He had an open-hearted character, since they were going to be comrades was he going to speak formally to them. He advised that they talk to each other in a normal manner. They asked them to feel at ease. The students did not feel comfortable addressing their elders in such a nonchalant way.

“There are magic cravings on the plate. I will make a small wound with a needle on your finger, just drip a drop of your blood onto that magic formation. Then the owner of that plate will be registered. If you say “Status Open”, the plate will display you your stats. Ah, have you never heard of such a thing? I didn’t know that. This is a kind of artifact from ancient times. ”

“Artifact?”

Kouki asked the question because he was not familiar with the word.

“The artifact is a powerful tool that cannot be reproduced with modern means. It is said that they were created when God and his family still roamed this land. The status plate is one of the artifacts he left behind that cannot be reproduced. It is usually would be called a national treasure rather than an artifact, but it is distributed in the generally public. Because it was a very convenient ID card. ”

I see, so the student’s poked their fingers for their blood and smeared their blood onto the plates to activate the innate magic. The magic formation shined red for an instant. Hajime did the same with his blood and plate.

Name Hajime
Age 17 Years Old
Gender Male
Class Transmutation Artist (Synergist)
Level 1
Strength 10
Vitality 10
Agility 10
Intelligence 10
Magic 10
Magic Resistance 10
Skills
Transmutation
Language Comprehension

To see the stats displayed, he couldn’t help but feel like he was a character in a game. The other students were looking over their status seriously. The stats were than explained to them by Meld.

“Did everyone see? Let me explain. First, let go over “level”. The level will increase if you get an increase in stats. The max level for a

human was 100. In other words, the level shows the base and potential that a human can reach. When you reach level 100, then you have achieved the potential of humans. It is very rare for someone to reach that though."

Unlike games, leveling up does not mean getting extra stats in our case.

"Your stats can be raised by training, magic, or magical tools. Also, someone with a high magic stat allows other stats to increase faster. Although we don't know the whole detail, it is believe that magical power somehow assists the physical body to improve.

Afterwards, look forward to the gear we selected for you. After all, you are the heroes. The national treasury is being used to supply you!"

From what Meld said, just because you kill a demon or monster does not guarantee your stats will go up. The stats will improve steadily with practice and experience.

"Next we are going to cover "Class". Simply this is the talent you have. The skills you have at the end of your status is directly linked to the class you have. People who have a class are rare. The classes can be divided into two category: combat classes and non-combat classes. A combat class only shows up in 1 out of 1000 people with classes. Non-combat class only shows up in 1 out of 100 people. Out of those non-combat jobs there are about 1 out of 10 that have an extraordinary class. Most of the people in non-combat classes have manufacturing classes."

Hajime took a look at his stats. Surely his class was "Synergist". He was gifted the ability to "synergize". Well, they were from a stronger world, so naturally he should have higher specs than a normal person from Tortus. Hajime just slightly smirked at that thought. After all he was glad to have talent. However his joy was short lived because Meld started to explain more about the stats.

"So…let's see everyone's stats. For example, the average person has stats of around 10 at level 1. Well you guys should have several times higher than that. So enviable! Please give reports on what

your status plate says. This is so we can develop a training regimen that fits each of you.”

The average person at level 1 has stats around 10. Hajime’s stats lined up perfectly to display 10s on all of them. Hajime tilt his head and scratched at it as he broke out in an unpleasant sweat.

(Are? No matter how you look at it, I’m so average…so absolutely average. Not a cheat. I’m not “TUEEEE”(?) What about everyone else? Maybe it was like this in the beginning.)

Hajime clings to that hope as he looks around at the others. Everyone else had a bright face, nothing like how Hajime’s face was like.

Immediately responding to Meld’s request, Kouki steps forward to report his status.

Name Kouki
Age 17 Years Old
Gender Male
Class Hero
Vitality 100
Mana 100
Strength 100
Resistance 100
Agility 100
Magic Resistance 100
Skills
Aptitude All Attribute
Resist All Elements
Resist Physical
Complex Magic
Swordplay
Herculean Strength
Quick Movement
Foresight
High-speed Magic Recovery
Sign Perception
Magic Perception
Limit Break
Language Comprehension

The definition of a Cheat.

“Ho, truly a hero. To be at the same stats as me at level 1…I’m a little depressed. Usually a person only has 2 to 3 skills… unbelievable. Very reliable.”

“Iya～, Ahaha…”

Kouki scratches his head in embarrassment at Meld’s praise. By the way, Meld is level 62. His stats average at around 200, and this is considered top-level in the world for a human. However, Kouki is already at half his stats at only level 1. At this growth rate, he will overpass him quickly.

By the way, Skill can equate to talent and that is something that cannot be changed. The only exception is “Derivation Skill.” This derives from polishing ones skill for many years, this skill is acquired when the person can “break through the wall” to acquire it. It sounds easy, but it has not been done before, it would mean to get a boost in skill level in just one day.

It was thought that only Kouki was special, but the others had superior stats, although not as good as Kouki, they can still be considered cheats. A lot of the classmates had combat classes too. Hajime just looked at his class name. When trying to imagine his class, it was not possible to see this class in battle. Also, he only had two skills. One of them was the default language comprehension too. Truthfully, he only had one real skill then. Hajime just gave a dry smile at that. Because he had to report to him, Hajime handed his plate to Meld.

Until now, Meld had a great expression from seeing all those special status plates. To be able to have so many strong comrades was a joy. Meld’s expression retained its smile as he stated “Huh?” He beat the plate Hajime handed to him to see if it was malfunctioning, and held it up to the light. After staring at it, he returned the plate to Hajime with an unremarkable expression.

“Ah, this is. If you think about Synergists, it was a crafting class. It’s useful if you want to be a blacksmith…”

Meld described the class to Hajime with as much articulation as he could. The boys who did not like Hajime, would jump at

opportunity to make fun of Hajime. The class was clearly a non-combat class. All his classmates had combat classes, Hajime would not be helpful in the future battles because of this.

While grinning, Hiyama Daisuke screamed out.

“Oi Oi, Nagumo. It can’t possibly be, but did you get a non-combat class? How can a crafting class fight? Meld-san, is this class rare?”

“…Iya, 1 out of every 10 crafting class is one. All the countries employ a lot of them.”

“Oi oi, Nagumo~, are you going to fight like that?”

Hiyama throws an arm around Hajime’s shoulder, this just annoys Hajime. If you look around at the students, the boys in particular were grinning at his misfortune.

“Sa~, I won’t know if I don’t try it out.”

“Jyaa, let us see your stats. The class isn’t that great, but you do have great stats, right?”

He could already guess the stats from the expression Meld had earlier, he just wanted to bully Hajime even more. He really is a bastard. His three lackeys also joined in on the fun. It was the typical behavior, the lackeys joined in with their leader while he picked on someone. The fact was though, Kaori and Shizuku had very unpleasant expression at the bullying.

If Daisuke liked Kaori, how was he not able to read her disdain for this kind of treatment? Hajime just handed the plate like it was nothing.

When he looked at Hajime’s plate, Hiyama laughed at it. He passed the plate to the others and his followers also joined in on the laughter.

“Fu~Hahahaha, what is this? All of it is so average.”

“Kya~hahah, all of it is 10. He is probably weaker than the kids around the block.

“Hi~hahahah, I can’t take it! He is going to die! He can’t even be a meat shield!”

Kaori started to approach the students that were laughing with an angry expression. However, before she got there, someone let out a voice filled with anger. It was Aiko-sensei.

“Kora-! What are you guys laughing at? Laughing at your fellow classmate is something I will not allow! I will absolutely not allow it! Return Nagumo-kun’s plate!”

Aiko-sensei tried to express her anger as well as she could have with her tiny body. The plate was reluctantly returned to Hajime after that.

Aiko-sensei tried to cheer Hajime up by tapping his shoulders.

“Nagumo-kun, don’t mind it at all. I’m also a non-combat class. Just like my class, my stats are average. You’re not alone, Nagumo-kun.”

At that, Hajime was handed Aiko-sensei’s plate.

Name Yamada Aiko
Age 25 Years Old
Gender Female
Class Farmer
Level 30
Vitality 300
Mana 300
Strength 80
Agility 80
Dexterity 80
Vitality 80
Intelligence 80
Magic Resistance 100
Skills
Soil Management,
Soil Restoration,
Range Cultivation,
Growth Stimulation,
Selective Breeding,
Plant Appraisal,
Fertilizer Production,
Mixture Development,
Auto Harvest,
Fermentation Operation,
Range Temperature Adjustment,
Farm Barrier,

Abundant Rain,
Language Comprehension

Hajime look at the plate with dead-fish eyes.

“Are, what’s the matter? Nagumo-kun!” Aiko-sensei started to shake Hajime. Yeah, her stats overall was average, her class was also non-combat, but if only comparing magic it was hero level. She also had quite a number of skills. Resources were a big problem in wars. Unlike Hajime’s class, this was a very good alternative. Aiko-sensei was good enough to be considered a cheat.

This damaged him even more because he thought he was not alone.

“Ara Ara, Ai-chan stop sparkling…”

“Na-Nagumo-kun! Are you okay?”

Hajime was no longer responding, Shizuku just smiled wryly at it. Kaori runs up anxiously. Aiko just tilts her head in confusion. As usual, Aiko-sensei was somewhat of an airhead.

Although it did stop the bullying Hajime was going through, but it seemed that the future was going to be hard for Hajime.

* * *

Setting is haphazard.

Possibility of modification is high.

Chapter 3 : Bullying the Weakest

Two weeks has passed since Hajime's condition was known to everyone.

Currently, Hajime was using his break from training to check out the Royal Library. There was a huge book that was titled "An Illustrated Guide to The Monsters of the North Continent" that Hajime read a lot of. Why read such a book? Because even after training for 2 weeks, his talentless showed even more. Since he was not strong, he decided to study to gain knowledge and wisdom to use.

Hajime looked through the book for quite a while, but eventually sighed and threw it back onto the desk. When the book made a loud noise, the librarian glared at Hajime.

After flinching at the glare, Hajime apologized for the noise. "Hey! There won't be a next time," after he received the stare they let it go. "What are you doing!?" he said to himself, acting like his own Tsukkomi, he sighed at that revelation.

Hajime slowly took out his Status Plate and rested it on his palm.

Name Hajime
Age 17 Years Old
Gender Male
Class Transmutation Artist (Synergist)
Strength 12
Vitality 12
Agility 12
Intelligence 12
Magic 12
Magic Resistance 12
Skills
Transmutation
Language Comprehension

This was the result of 2 weeks of hard training. What a big increase! I shouldn't try to be my own secret Tsukkomi. By the way, Kouki's…

Age 17 Years Old
Name Kouki
Gender
Class
Vitality
Mana
Strength
Agility
Dexterity
Magic Resistance
Skills
Aptitude All Attribute
Resist All Elements
Resist Physical
Complex Magic
Swordplay
Herculean Strength
Quick Movement
Foresight
High-speed Magic Recovery
Sign Perception
Magic Perception
Limit Break
Language Comprehension

His growth rate was 5 times that of Hajime's.

Just as a bonus, Hajime found out that he had no magical aptitude. What happens if you have no magical aptitude? Let's explains the concept of magic in this world.

The magic in Tortus is process where magic from within the body is utilized with an aria and magic formation. The magic will then proceed through the magical formula in the magic formation to achieve the results. There is no way to directly manipulate magic in its base form, so you must correctly set up the magic formation you want to use.

Also the amount of magic used is directly related to how long the incantation lasts. The amount of formulas and formations in the magic formation also dictates its complexity and scale of effect. all of this is necessary to perform stronger spells. Even to just cast a simple "Fireball", that is present in classic RPGs, it takes a 20 cm diameter magical formation to cast it. The basic concepts are: attribute, power, range, scope, and mana usage all of this is

required. There can be other things added to the formula like inductivity and sustain duration to create stronger magic.

However, there are exceptions to these concepts. These are “aptitudes”. With this, some parts of the formula can be omitted. For example, if you have an aptitude with Fire, you can skip writing the attribute section of the magic formula. This omission is done because the person can imagine it. Instead of writing it out, the person can imagine the fire when chanting the spell.

Because most human beings have some kind of aptitude, the 20 cm diameter magic formation is about average. In Hajime cases, because he has no aptitude, he has to add a lot of to his formula to get the same affect. He has to add concepts like: speed, trajectory, ballistic-diffusion rate, and much more. For his case, it would take a 2 m magic circle to perform that “fireball” spell. This was totally useless in combat.

For magic, there is two ways to engrave the magic formula, into special metals or minerals that allow for reuse or disposable special paper. The former way is more expensive and more powerful than the disposable version. Since the non-paper version are bulky, you can’t carry around much of them. Both of the variations have their own advantages and disadvantages. The staff that Ishtar has is the permanent type.

Because of how magic worked, it was not practical in close combat, it would be impossible if the person did not have an aptitude. For a manufacturing class, “Synergist” was stuck with useless skills that just process or changed the forms of minerals. There was no artifact that helped with the synergy, just gloves that had the synergy magical formula drawn on it. Well, he can make pitfall and protrusions. Hajime had been able to do it on the ground and gradually he could up the scale. Well, it was useless in combat.

All his classmates labeled him useless after they saw his stats and his progress after 2 weeks. Reluctantly, he started to accumulate knowledge. He did not see a bright future ahead for him, this caused him to sigh increasingly each day.

Hajime considered, while looking at the blue sky from the library

window, whether he should take a trip. It was at the very end. Hajime had begun to be lost in wondering where he wanted to go, while he was learning things that he tried so hard to learn these past 2 weeks.

(After all, he wanted to check out the demi-human country. He can't really say he went to another world if he did not experience a kemomimi. However, they were in the "Sea of Trees". Besides the slaves, it was rare to see them outside of the forest.)

To Hajime's knowledge, the Demi-humans were a race that was discriminated. They lived in the Hartzena Forest that spread north and south on the east side of the continent. They are discriminated against because they do not have any magical power at all.

In ancient times, this world was created by ancient magic that was performed by their god Eht. The magic used in this age is a degrade version of those ancient magic. Therefore, it is believed that magic is a gift from God. Well, that is what the Church of Saints taught everyone.

So, for a race to not have any magical power, it is perceived by humans that they were scorned by God.

Then, how did monster come into being? The monster's are not to be gifted by God, but rather they were just a natural disaster that occurred. They were only vermin. Hajime was disgusted inwardly by the interpretation people had on them.

The Devils worshipped a different God than the ones that the Church worshipped. This was similar to how the Demi-humans thought too. Devil's all had a very high aptitude for magic. They were able to perform stronger magic with shorter incantations and smaller magic formations than humans.

Humans thought the Devils were their enemies because they worshipped a different God, and discriminate against the unloved Demi-humans. This was what the Church taught. The Devil's felt the same. The Demi-humans, just wanted to live in peace. All the races were very exclusive.

(If going to the “Sea of Trees” is impossible, maybe I should head for the west sea. If I remember correctly, there is a maritime town called Erisen. If I can’t see a Kemomimi, than I want to see a Mermaid. It’s a man’s romance. He wanted to try the seafood here too.)

The town is said to be off the coast of the western sea and a group of demi-human fishermen are there. This is the only demi-human group that is protected by the Empire. This is because 80% of the seafood the northern continent consumes is provided by them. It’s pretty much a straight reason. I wonder where the religious reason to discriminate them had gone? When he heard the story, Hajime felt like he was a Tsukkomi at that.

Past the western sea is the large Guryuen Desert. In this desert is the great transist oasis the Dukedom of Ancarge and the Mountain of Great Flames. This Mountain of Great Flames is one of the 8 Great Dungeons.

The 8 Great Dungeons, are one of the most dangerous areas in the world. The previously mentioned Hartzena Forest is also one, and another is the Orcus Dungeon which is located southwest of the Hairihi Kingdom. The reason they were considered 3 of the 8 Great Dungeons is because it was recorded in history. The other 5 Great Dungeons have yet to be located.

One of the proposed Great Dungeon is the Raisen Great Canyon, which expands from the north to south of the continent. At the southern hinterlands, where snow and ice are prominent is another rumored Great Dungeon called the Schnee Snowfield.

(After all, the desert is impossible…no other choice but to look for slaves in the Empire. As expected though I have no confidence in treating someone as a slave.)

When mentioning Empire, it refers to the Hersha Empire. This country is a rising country that was formed by mercenaries that fought a large-scale war against the Devils 300 years ago. The Empire is known for employing mercenaries and is regard as a military centered nation, often adventurers congregated there. Advocates the supremacy of force and is quite the black country.

This Empire thought about the uses for Demi-humans, they concluded that the Demi-humans could be slaves.

The Hersha Empire existed to the east of the Hairihi Kingdom, and between these two countries is the neutral Fyulen Commercial City. The neutral city is an independent entity that does not rely on any country. Using its neutrality, the city was able to exert all of its management into economic expansion. If there is anything you want, the Commercial City is believed to have it.

(But, if I want to return I can't just run away. Crap, it's almost time for training!)

After all, it was just escapism of his current situation. Since it was almost time for training, Hajime left the library in a hurry. From the library, it was a short distance to the Royal Palace, on the way you can hear and see the bustle in the Royal Capital. There was the voices of children playing and shopkeepers advertising their wares. A distance away you can hear someone scolding a child, this was the picture of a daily peaceful day.

(Since there does not seem to be a war, can't they just return us.)

Hajime just dreamed of that impossibility. It was just escapism to the depressing times that were ahead.

* * *

When Hajime arrived at the training facility, there were already many students there. Some of them were chatting while others were doing some free practice. It seems like he arrived earlier than he thought. Hajime went to get a western-style sword, that was provided for at the side, and did some free practice while he waited.

Suddenly from behind, something surprised Hajime to cause him to move. By rotating he was able to avoid it but he broke out into a cold sweat at the drawn sword. Hajime looked back while he was frowning, he had a tired expression at this.

There they were, led by Hiyama Daisuke, was the Bastards Four

(Hajime made it up). Since their training had started, they have been messing with Hajime whenever possible. They were half the reason why he felt depressed when training. (The other half was his incompetence).

“Yo, Nagumo. What are you doing? Even though you are useless with a sword. Seriously useless.”

“Hey, that’s so mean, Hiyama. Even if it’s the truth～ Gya ha ha ha.”

“Why do you even come to train every day? If I was you, I would be too ashamed to come. Hi hi hi!”

“Hey, Daisuke. Since this guy is so pathetic, why don’t we help him practice?”

They laughed and grinned at that like it was the funniest thing in the world.

“Hey, you are so nice, Shinji. Well, since I’m so nice too, I’ll help out～”

“Good idea. Since I’m super nice, I’ll use my precious time to help. You should be thankful, Nagumo～”

Hiyama would take them to an area where other people would not see, while he acted friendly with Hajime and spoke. The classmates that noticed this would just turn a blind eye to it.

“Iya, I’m fine by myself. You can just leave me to myself.”

Hajime tried to refuse gently.

“Hey, when we are going out of our way just to help the useless you, what are you saying? Seriously, I can’t have that. You should just stay quiet and thank us for helping you.”

As he said that, he struck Hajime in the side. Hajime jerked as a his face turned into a painful expression at the blow. At that point the Bastards Four did not hesitate to get gradually more violent with him. Although it was unavoidable since it was adolescence boys that suddenly realized they had power. Though it sucked to be the

aim of their violence. Hajime had no power to resist them with. He just had to clench his teeth and bare with it.

When they arrived at an unpopulated area of the training facility that no one else had vision of. Hiyama bull rushed Hajime.

“Hey, let’s hurry up and start. It’s time for fun training.”

At this moment Hiyama, Nakano, Saito, and Kondo surrounded Hajime. Hajime just stood there and prepared himself.

“Gua!”

At that moment, he got smashed in the back from behind. Kondo hit Hajime with his sword that still had its sheath. Hajime screamed and fell down face first, but they continued to press.

“Hey, why are you sleeping? Burn～! I command thee Fire, “Kakyu (Fireball)”.”

Nakano casted “Fireball”. Hajime, who was on floor because of the blow from Kondo, could not get up fast enough from the pain, so he desperately rolled to avoid the spell. However at this time, Saito had completed his spell.

“I command thee Wind, “Kazedama (Windball).”

The wind hit Hajime directly in the abdomen, and he fell on his back. A “blech” could be heard as Hajime vomited from the blow. The magic circle was a simple one at 10 cm in diameter.

Still there was enough power in that spell to knock out a pro boxer. The artifact was one for high aptitude and high magic power was supplied for by the Kingdom. Normally these would have been used in cooking or just making a breeze.

“Wow, so weak! Hey Nagumo, take this seriously～”

Hiyama kicked Hajime, who was crouching to vomit, in the stomach as he said this. Hajime did his best to control the feeling of vomiting welling in him.

The lynching, disguised as practice, continued for a while after that. Hajime tighten his jaw to endure the pain, while he thought in vexation to himself how weak he was. Normally at this point, even if you were no match, there would be a counterattack.

However, ever since he was small, whenever he encountered something like this, Hajime was not good at dealing with it and just backed off. Hajime would just tell himself to endure it. He thought it was better than fighting.

While some people may think that it was very kind of Hajime, but others would think he was pathetic for it. Even Hajime wasn't sure which it was.

The pain was getting unbearable, suddenly, a girls voice filled with anger rang out.

"What are you doing?!"

When the Bastards Four heard that voice, they thought they were busted. They thought that because the voice belong to Kaori, who Hiyama liked. It wasn't just Kaori, the rest of the gang was there.

"Iya, don't get us wrong. We were just helping Nagumo practice."

"Nagumo-kun!"

Kaori totally ignored Hiyama, and Kaori rushed over to Hajime, who was coughing up a fit. The moment she saw Hajime's state, everyone else did not matter, like Hiyama.

"Practice. This is such a one-sided practice."

"Iya, that is…"

"Good excuse. Even if Nagumo can't fight, he is a fellow classmate. Don't do something this again."

"If you have so much free time, go train yourselves."

Not wanting to argue more, Hiyama and the others laughed deceptively and hastily left. Kaori healed Hajime with her healing

magic.

“Thank you, Shirasaki-san. You saved me.”

Kaori just shakes her head at him while looking teary eyed.

“Have they always been doing this to you? If so, I’ll…”

Kaori’s face formed into an angry expression and glares at the direction the Bastards Four left in, Hajime stopped her.

“Iya, it’s not always like this. I’m fine, so don’t worry about it.”

“But…”

Hajime smiled at Kaori, who did not seem to be convinced. Reluctantly, Kaori decided to let it go.

“Nagumo-kun, if you need anything, don’t hesitate to ask. Kaori will agree to it.”

Shizuku said this with a wry smile as she took up Kaori’s side. Hajime just said thanks to that. However, someone decided to be a wet blanket with their Hero like quality.

“However, Nagumo should try harder. Being weak does not excuse you from trying to get stronger. If I heard correctly, after practice you just head to the library. If I was you, I would use the free time to get stronger. Nagumo, you should take this more seriously. I think Hiyama and his friends are just trying to correct your non-serious attitude.”

How do I interpret that? Hajime was just stunned by it, Kouki was just a person that believed in the good of others, so he did not see what really was going on. He did not think humans were possible of such evils. He just thought that there was a good reason for them to act that way. When he looked at it, Hajime was possibly the cause. It seemed that was his process of thought.

Kouki did not have any malice or ill intent in his thoughts. He was seriously just trying to advise Hajime. Hajime did not have the energy to try to clear the misunderstanding. He thought it would be

useless to argue with someone like Kouki, who had such a strong sense of justice.

Shizuku who understood everything just sighed at that and apologized to Hajime.

“Gomenasai ne? Kouki didn’t mean any harm.”

“Ahaha, it’s okay. I understand.”

Hajime replied with a smile. He got up to wipe his dirty clothes.

“Hora, training is going to start. Let’s go.”

Hajime urges everyone to head back to the training facility. Kaori still looked worried, but Hajime decided to pretend not to notice. As expected, as a man, he did not want to be babied by a girl.

When they reached the facility, a deep sigh was released because of the events today. The future looked bleak.

* * *

After training finished, usually they would have free time until dinner, but this time Meld held them back to make an announcement. The students wondered what he would say. Meld used a deep voice to announce.

“Tomorrow, as practical training, we will be venturing into the Orcus Dungeon. All the necessary items will be prepared for, the monsters outside the capital are totally different from training so please make note of that. Get ready! For today, just rest. Dismissed.”

After saying that, he quickly left. The student were hustling and bustling at the announcement. Hajime just looked up into the sky.

(…Really bleak.)

Chapter 4 : A Chat Under the Moonlight

Still not the strongest.

Wanted to convey how it felt for someone that did not get their strength so easily given to them.

* * *

Orcus Dungeon.

This was a large labyrinth that consisted of 100 levels. As one of the 8 Great Dungeons, the lower you go, the stronger the monsters become. Still, this dungeon was a very popular place for mercenaries and adventurers. This place was also a great training ground for recruits. This is because it was easy to measure the strength of the monsters by the dungeon level. The monsters also have better quality magic stone than the monsters in the wilderness.

The magic stone is the core of a monster and it is this that provides them with powers. The bigger and better quality the stone, the stronger the monster is. These stones are what is used as raw materials to make magic formulas. The magic formation can be drawn to cast the spell, but they can also be drawn with the powder made from the magic stone. Using non-magic stone materials to make the magic circle diminishes the power by 1/3.

In brief, it was better to use the magic stone to power spells because it was more effective. In addition, a magic stone is used to make magic tools that is used in everyday life. There is a very high demand for these magic stones. Both the military and civilians needed it.

By the way, strong monsters with high quality magic stone can use special magic. Special Magic does not use magical chants or circles to perform that magic. The monsters cannot use a large variety of magic, but they do not require the incantation or circle. This special magic is the reason why monsters are dangerous.

The students and knights led by Meld arrived at the town, Horlad, that adventurers stayed at before they headed into the Dungeon. They used at an inn that was managed by the Kingdom, where recruits in training stayed at. Hajime, who had not seen a normal room in a long time, dived into the bed. All the rooms were designed for two people but only Hajime got a room to himself. He could be carefree here. He wasn't lonely by himself.

Tomorrow was the day they would challenge the dungeon. This time, they would only challenge the first 10 levels. If it is only that, even someone as weak as Hajime should be fine in behind cover. Still Hajime wanted to apologize for being a burden. Rather, he was glad to be out of the city… Hajime could not read the atmosphere.

For a while, Hajime read the monster reference book he got from the library. It was still early but he decided to sleep earlier. Hajime had already perfected his sleeping skill in his school life. When he was about to doze off, he heard someone knock on his door. Even if it was still early for Hajime who was used to all nighters in Japan, it was about midnight for Tortus. Wha, was it Hiyama? Hajime was a little worried. However, when he heard the voice, he relaxed.

"Nagumo-kun, are you still awake? It's me, Shirasaki. Can I bother you for a moment?"

What? For a moment he froze, but after he hurried to the door. He removed the lock and opened the door. Kaori was standing there with a snow-white negligee on.

"Say What??"

"Eh?"

When presented with such a scene, Hajime unexpectedly switched to a Kansai dialect and performed a Tsukkomi. Kaori was speechless because she didn't hear it well. Quickly he gathered himself, he tried not to stare too much at Kaori. Although he didn't have too much interest, he was still an adolescent boy. The current appearance of Kaori was slightly too stimulating.

"Iya, it's nothing. Eh, what's the matter? Did you have something to

tell me?”

“No, I just wanted to talk to you. I wonder if I’m bothering you?”

“Come in.”

Most likely, he thought it was about the trip tomorrow, but Kaori quickly shot down his thoughts. The upturned eyes was so explosive. It’s super effective! She noticed the open door and invitation.

“Okay.”

Without any caution, she entered the room happily. She sat at the table near the window. Hajime unconsciously prepares the tea while still being slightly confused. Even though it was really just something like a tea bag that imitated black tea. He prepared enough for both, and handed her own. Hajime took the set across from her.

“Thank you.”

Kaori took the offered fake tea and tasted it with joy. The moonlight that shone through the window illuminates her. It seemed like there was a halo around her glossy black hair, she looked like an angel. Without any lust, Hajime was fascinated with Kaori’s purity. He recovered himself when he heard Kaori place down her cup. Hajime drank his tea to calm his mind. He choked a little as he drank too fast. How embarrassing.

Kaori giggled at his state. Hajime quickly struck a conversation to quickly hide his embarrassment.

“So, what did you want to talk about? Is it about tomorrow?”

To Hajime’s question, Kaori nodded her head. Unlike her smiling face from just a moment ago, she started to brood.

“It’s about the trip into the dungeon tomorrow. I want Nagumo-kun to stay here. I will persuade and explain to the instructors and everyone. So, please!”

She leaned over as she pleaded with Hajime. Hajime was perplexed. Even if Hajime was a burden, wasn't this a little too much?

"Eto, I know I'm a burden…but since I'm already here I don't think I'll be able to just stay put."

"You're wrong. I don't mean you're a burden."

Kaori tried to clear up the misunderstanding. Maybe I was too hasty, she thought. She put her hand on her chest and took a deep breath. It calmed her down a little. She quickly and quietly apologized.

"I just had a very bad feeling. When I was sleeping earlier, I was dreaming and you were there. When I called out to you, you did not even notice. When I chased you, I never caught up. At the end…"

She seemed afraid to speak the rest. Wanting to hear the rest, Hajime urged her to continue.

"At the end?"

With a jerk, Kaori lifted her head. Hajime saw her teary expression, and her biting her lips.

"You disappeared."

"I see."

They sat in silence for a while. Hajime looks at Kaori, who was still hanging her head. It really was an ominous dream, but it was just a dream. With just that, they wouldn't permit him to stay. If such a thing was allowed, there would be trouble from the classmates. If such a thing happened, he really would not be welcomed anymore. He had no choice but to go. To reassure Kaori, Hajime started to speak as gently as possible.

"A dream is just a dream, Shirasaki-san. This time we have Meld and his veteran knights to accompany us. A lot of strong people like Kouki are coming with us. Rather, our whole class is amazing. I actually feel sorry for our enemies. I am weak and because I have shown such weakness is probably the reason for your dreams."

Kaori just stared at Hajime with an anxious expression, while he spoke.

“Still…Still…I’m still worried.”

“Then.”

Hajime was somewhat shy, but he stared straight into Kaori’s eyes.

“Will you protect me?”

“Eh?”

He was aware of what he was saying, and as a man saying this to her it ashamed him. His face was already red with shame. In the room that was illuminated by the moonlight. Kaori understood the situation well.

“You are a healer, right Shirasaki-san? Healer was a class that had an innate talent for healing magic. No matter what, even if I get injured, you can cure me. Will you protect me with this power? If so, I believe I’ll be fine.”

Kaori just stared at him for a bit. Hajime just endured desperately the shame that he felt, and he kept his eyes from breaking contact with Kaori’s. Even though his body was writhing.

The biggest cause of a person’s insecurity is the unknown. Kaori right now, was worrying about what could possibly attack Hajime. So, it would be soothing, if they had the confidence to face the unknown that would attack him.

For a while, they stared at each other. The silence was broken when Kaori started to smile.

“You never change, Nagumo-kun.”

“?”

Hajime made a doubtful expression as Kaori said that. Kaori laughed at his expression.

“Nagumo-kun, you probably think we first met in high school. I knew you since the second year of middle school.”

This revelation caused Hajime to widen his eyes in shock. He quickly searched through his memories, but he couldn’t recall the meeting. Hajime groaned as he thought, and this caused Kaori to giggle at him.

“It was a one-sided meeting. The first time I saw you, you were in Dogeza (Prostration). Since you were in such a position, you did not see me.”

“Do-Dogeza!?”

Why did she see him in such an uncool time? His body writhed again, but for a different reason this time. Where and when did she see him in such a position? He frantically searched his memories. Kaori giggled as she saw Hajime make so many comedic faces.

“Yeah, you were surrounded by shady people. Even when they spit at you, poured their drinks on you, or stepped on you, you did not stop. Before long, the left appalled.”

“I showed such an unsightly sight…”

Hajime felt like dying a little. It would have been the same as if she saw him when he was still suffering from his Chunibyo. And it would have to be the worst scene in his dark past. Only a humorless smile came out. The same humorless smile that came out when he found out that his mom had found his hidden Ero doujinshi stash and placed them neatly on his bookshelf.

However, Kaori just gave him a gentle look. One that was free from contempt and ridicule.

“No, it wasn’t unsightly. Rather, when I saw you like that, I thought you were a very strong and kind person.”

“Ha?”

Hajime couldn’t believe what he heard. That’s not the kind of impression someone would have, if they saw that. Perhaps,

Shirasaki-san had a special fetish for that? Hajime thought it was very rude to imagine such a thing.

“I mean, Nagumo-kun. You did it for the sake of a grandmother and her grandson.”

When she said that, Hajime finally remembered something. There was such an incident during his middle school years.

It started when the little boy accidently hit delinquents, and smashed his Takoyaki onto them. The little boy started to cry, the delinquents started to niggle the grandmother. The grandmother cowered in fear, they were in a very difficult situation.

By chance Hajime was just passing through. When the grandmother started to take out her wallet, his body moved on its own. He had never fought in his life before. He had only practice his Chunibyo Special Moves at home. It couldn’t be helped against such opponents, so he performed Dogeza. In public he did it. It was unexpectedly embarrassing for everyone there. He felt like running away. It went as planned and soon the delinquents left.

“Strong people would have solved it easily with violence. Kouki would defeat the person that was causing the trouble. But I don’t think there are many people who would help others even when they were not strong. Especially someone that would prostate themselves for the sake of others. In fact, at that time, I was afraid. I just used the excuse that if I was strong like Shizuku, but I just stood there and did nothing. Just asking someone to save them.”

“Shirasaki-san…”

“So, I believe you are the strongest person I know. When I saw you in high school, I was so happy to see you. I wanted to become like you, and get to know you. But you just fell asleep…”

“Ahaha, Sorry.”

Hajime was shy and embarrassed when he knew the reason Kaori interacted with him so much. He just laughed wryly at the unexpected high opinion she held for him.

“Therefore, even if I am a little uneasy. I’ll make sure you don’t do anything crazy in the dungeon. Like when you faced the delinquents.”

Kaori looked at Hajime with determination.

“I’ll protect you, Nagumo-kun.”

Hajime accepted her determination. He looked straight at her, and nodded.

“Thank you.”

Immediately after, Hajime wryly laughed. The role of the man and woman was totally reversed. Without doubt, Kaori was playing the hero. While Hajime was playing the damsel in distress. He couldn’t help but laugh at the weird situation.

They chatted for a few moments, then Kaori returned to her room. While Hajime was laying on the bed, he thought over things. He wanted to find something he could be useful for. Hajime wanted to rid himself of his incompetence. It did not sit so well with him, that he was so dependent on others. Hajime fell asleep with renewed determination in mind.

* * *

Nobody noticed the person that was staring as Kaori left Hajime’s room. The person just had an ugly distorted expression on their face.

Chapter 5 : Trap

Currently, Hajime and party is gathered around the square just in front of the Orcus Dungeon entrance.

For Hajime, he imagined a dark gloomy entrance, but the entrance looked like the entrance to a museum, heck it even had a reception desk for the entrance. There was a smiling Onee-san in uniform that was checking people who entered and left the dungeon. Apparently, this was the place people checked in with their Status Plate. Using those figures, they could record who perished in the dungeon. With the war nearing, they did not want too many casualties.

In the square near the entrance, there were many stalls there lined up. The shops were competing against each other. It was like a festival. This place was a popular area to earn a good income because people naturally gathered here. The superficial levels of the Dungeon was popular. There were many people who wanted to challenge the Dungeon, some took it seriously while others just fooled around with their lives. There seemed to be a lot of criminal activity in the back alley near the Dungeon. The country, with help from the adventurer guild, have establish operations and facilities to limit the crimes because of the pending war. This was very useful because you can buy and sell material here, and it was close to the Dungeon.

While the class was looking around like some bumpkins, they followed the duck-like mount behind Meld.

* * *

The inside of the Dungeon was totally different to the bustling of the outside. There is not much ambient light, but in front was a passage that emitted light. The passage was about 5 m high and wide, it was possible to see to some extent even without any magical light or torches. Special green stones, that were buried in the walls, emitted light to brighten the dungeon. Orcus Dungeon seemed like it had a huge vein of these green stones.

The party organized into rank and progressed forward. For a while,

nothing of interest happened till they advanced into a hall. The hall was dome shaped and the ceiling looked to be around 7-8 m high. Gray fluffy balls gushed out from the cervices of the wall.

“Okay, Kouki and group step forward. Anyone else fall back! We will take shifts for the front-line. Get ready! These monsters are called Ratmen. They are that strong or dangerous, but they are quick. Take it steadily.”

Just like he said, the Ratmen jumped at them with speedily. Their scarlet eyes shined eerily between their gray hair. Their name suited them. Ratmen were bipedal and had a muscular upper body, and they had mouse-like features. Only their chest and abdomen, which had an 8 pack, was not covered in hair. It was like they were showing off their abs.

The front-line was comprised of Kouki and his party. When Shizuku, who was at the front, saw the enemy her face stiffen up. The Ratmen gave off a creepy feeling. Kouki, Shizuku, and Ryutaro intercepted the charging Ratmen. Meanwhile, two girls that were close to Kaori started to chant. The girls were Nakamura Eri the meganekko, and Taniguchi Suzu the energetic loli. They prepare to invoke their magic. They stayed in the formation they were taught.

Kouki wielded his white shining bastard sword so quickly that it was hard to see the motions, he quickly made short work of a few enemies. His sword was one of the artifacts that the Kingdom gave to him, the “Holy Sword”. The sword had a light attribute. Any enemies caught in the light, that the sword produces, weakens and it also automatically strengthens its wielder. Even if it is “Holy”, it has such “dirty” abilities.

Ryutaro’s class was a “Fist Fighter”, so he used gauntlets and shin guards as his equipment. These were also artifacts, and they could cause shock-waves. They were also believed to be unbreakable. Ryutaro takes a imposing stance and does not let any enemy pass by him with carefully placed kicks and punches. Though he had no shield, he acted like a heavy armored tank.

Shizuku, who was like a Samurai girl, with her “Swordswoman” class and sword that was like the mixture of a Shamshir and a

Katana. Took a battojutsu stance and drew her sword. All the enemies were cut in an instant. The draw was so refined, that the knights were dazzled by it.

While the other students were fascinated by Kouki's party's battle, a chant resounded.

"""Swirling Dark Flames, Incinerate My Enemies, Return them to the Earth as Ashes, "Spiral Flame"."""

Three people simultaneously casted it, and three spiraling flames engulfed the Ratmen. The Ratmen gave out a death cry as the flames turned them to ashes.

They noticed that all the Ratmen were wiped out. The other students didn't get a turn. It seemed like that the enemies on the first level were too weak for Kouki's party.

"Yeah, Good Job! Next time you guys try it, don't lower your guard though."

Meld warned not to let up, but he smiled at the prowess the students showed. However, the tension from their first experience at encountering monsters in a dungeon could not be stopped. The students faces broke out into smiles. Meld just shrugged his shoulders at their reactions.

"Although this is a training exercise, don't forget to keep in mind about Magic Stones. Since it's obviously overkill."

At Meld's words the people in Kaori's group that casted the spell blushed.

There were no particular problems from there, they repeated battles in the same manner. Everything was going well in the lower levels. Eventually, they arrived at the 20th floor, which is the mark of a first-class adventurer. The highest level explored was the 65th floor for Orcus Dungeon. This achievement was done by adventurers over 100 years ago. Getting to the 40th level is considered Elite first-class. Those who passed the 20th level was considered first-class. Since all the students were cheats, they easily broke through to the

20th level, even if they did not have much experience.

Traps were the scariest feature of a Dungeon. In some instances, the traps were lethal. There was something called Fair Scope for the lower levels. This is a gadget that detected traps by feeling flow of magic. Because most traps in a dungeon use magic, the Fair Scope can detect more than 80% of traps. The detecting range is somewhat narrow, so experience or information was needed to progress smoothly.

Therefore, they were able to quickly breeze through the floors. This was mainly because of how earnestly the Knights guided them. Meld especially mentioned to them that if they did not know the layout, check for the traps. If they were not sure if traps were around, move with caution.

“All right, you guys. From this point on, not only will there be other types of demons but they will work together to attack us. Do not get careless just because it had been easy so far! After we clear the 20th level, it will be it for today! Get fired up!”

Meld’s undertone in his message resounds with everyone. Up to this point, Hajime had not done anything in particular. Once, he practiced on a monster that the knights had weakened. He created a pitfall for the monster to fall into, and stabbed it with a sword. Until now, he had only defeated one dog-like monster.

No one wanted him in their party. Basically, he just stood behind the cover provided by the knights. It was pretty pathetic. However, by repeatedly using his “Synergy” skill in combat he could improve his magical power. His magical power raised by 2 points, it seemed actual combat was useful.

(Still, I’m totally a parasite player…)

Again, a weakened monster was thrown to Hajime by the Knight that weakened it. When it approached, Hajime transmuted the ground and breathed out a sigh. With it restrained, Hajime swung his sword to strike down the monster.

(Well, it seems like my precision with transmutation has gone up.

Let's do our best step-by-step.)

He consumed a magic replenishing pill, as he wiped the sweat of his brow. Hajime had not noticed, but there were some knights that were impressed with him.

The knight did not expect anything from him in the beginning. In battle however he dared to fight against the demons and do not just stand around. Of course, weakened monsters.

For the knights, they thought Hajime would fight using his barely used sword. Hajime choose to use his transmutation to seal their movements. He brought down decisive blows on the monsters with a reliably strategy that the Knights had never seen before. "Synergist" was considered as a crafting class. They had never thought of using the transmutation skill like that in combat.

Since he did not have anything else, Hajime thought about transmuting his weapon. He thought that if he could manipulate minerals, why can't he manipulate the ground? Since he was surrounded by so many strong people, and him just defeating a few, he felt useless. This was his first public exhibition of his tactic. When his impotence was shown in the combat training in the capital, he came up with this tactic.

They stopped for a short rest. He looked forward and met eyes with Kaori. She looked towards Hajime and smiled at him. Kaori seemed to be keeping an eye on him after last night's declaration to "protect" him. This caused Hajime to be embarrassed and he broke eye contact. Her expression sulked slightly at that. Shizuku who had been observing what was going on with a wry smile on her face, she asked in a small voice.

"Kaori, why are you two constantly looking at each other? You can't be considering a romantic comedy in the Dungeon, no time for that."

Kaori blushed at the teasing. She refuted Shizuku angrily.

"Mou, Shizuku-chan. Don't say strange things. I was just wondering if Nagumo-kun was alright. That's it!"

Shizuku knew it wasn't like that, but she kept her mouth shut. She didn't want to say anything that might upset her more. Though she couldn't hide the laughter in her eyes. Kaori saw that and just sulked at it.

Hajime just side glance at their state, suddenly he felt a gaze. The unpleasant gaze was full with negative emotions and seemed to be glued to him. Hajime was not unfamiliar with such stares in the classroom, but this was feeling could not compare, it was so grave.

It was not the first time today that he felt that gaze. Since the morning he had felt this stare. When he tried to locate the stare, it would disappear. Hajime was tired of it, after having it repeated so many times.

(I wonder what it is…did I do something? I thought I was doing my best even if I was incompetent. I wonder if that's the cause? I'm not getting arrogant! Target?)

Hajime breathed out a deep sigh. He started to feel the bad feelings Kaori mentioned.

The party searches the 20th level. Each level of the Dungeon was several kilometers in each direction. It would take dozens of people several months to map out an unknown level. 47 levels have been mapped properly, so it was not that easy to get lost. There was not a big worry of getting caught in a trap.

The innermost room of the 20th level had a very complicated geographical feature. The walls were protruding like a stalactite cave and icicles formed around the room. The stairs to the 21st floor was just ahead of this room. If they reached that point, the training would be done for the day. In ancient times they were able to wield transportation type magic, but at the current age such means was impossible. They must head back the old fashion way. The party relaxed slightly, since the walls were protruding they had to advance in a column.

After a bit, Kouki's party and Meld that was in the front stopped. The classmates who were keen, got into their fighting stance.

“They’re camouflage!. Make sure to pay attention to your surroundings!”

Meld advised them. The wall suddenly rose and discolored a bit. The body that was camouflaged was now dark brown, and they stood on 2 legs. It raised its chest and started to pound on it like a drum. When they took a good look at it, it was a gorilla-like demon with a camouflage ability.

“Rockmounts! Be careful of their arms, they are strong!”

Meld yelled echoed in the cave-like room. Kouki’s party went to engage them. Ryutaro was able to reflect the blow that came from a Rockmount. Kouki and Shizuku try to surround the beast. They could not position themselves because the terrain layout was too obstructive.

When the Rockmount felt that he could not pass by Ryutaro, it withdraw a bit and inhaled a deep breath.

“GuGaGaGaaaaa——!!””

The intense roar vibrated the whole room.

“Gu!?”

“Uwa!?”

“Kya!?”

A shock ran through their bodies, it did not damage them, but it froze them. This was Rockmount’s Special Magic “Intimidating Roar”. The roar carried the magic that caused the temporary paralysis.

Kouki’s vanguard took the roar almost point-blank, this caused them to freeze momentarily. The Rockmount took this gap in defense to attack, it lifted a boulder and threw it at Kaori’s rear guard. A stunning shot-put form was executed by it. The rock flew towards Kaori, and the frozen vanguard could not move to stop it.

Kaori and her partners ready the magic wands they had, to

intercept the boulder. There was not enough room to dodge it. However, the moment they were going to activate their magic, all of them involuntarily were stunned at the sight before them.

The boulder that was thrown was another Rockmount. Nearing Kaori's group, it did a stunning rotation and expanded its arms. It's appearance was like a Rune Diver. A voice saying "Ka-o-ri-chan~!" could almost be heard. Strangely, its eyes were bloodshot and its breathing was rough. Kaori, Eri, and Susu unintentionally screamed and stopped their magic.

"Hey! What are you doing in a battle"

In a hurry, Meld went to slay the Rockmount that was still in the dive. The girls apologized, but the bad feeling was still there. Their face had paled.

There a person that got mad at such a situation. Our very own mass of justice, Amanokawa Kouki.

"Bastard…You dare treat them like that…I won't forgive you!"

Kouki seemed to have misunderstood why the girls were pale and feeling bad, he thought they were afraid of their impending death. To frighten girls like that! Indescribably, small signs of anger surfaced on Kouki. His "Holy Sword" seemed to shine in response to his feelings.

"Myriad of Soaring Wings, Reach the Heavens, "Soaring Flash""

"Ah, this fool!"

Ignoring Meld's voice, Kouki brandished his sword over his head and swung down in one motion. His chant had made the sword emit an intense light, the slash released the light. Drawing a curve, the light bisected the Rockmount without encountering any resistance. The blade of light continued on until it destroyed the back wall.

Debris lightly fell from the damaged wall. Kouki exhaled and gave the girls a sparkling smile. He had defeated the monster that scared them. It's alright now! About to give credit to his voice, he was

approached by a smiling Meld who smack him.

“Ow!?”

“You fool. I understand how you feel, but you shouldn’t use such a technique in such a narrow place. If it collapse, what are you going to do?”

At Meld’s rebuke, he choked. Kouki tried to apologize. The girls approached him and gave him a strained smile to try to comfort him.

At that moment, the collapsed wall caught Kaori’s attention.

“What is that? It’s sparkling.”

Everyone looked at the wall Kaori was mentioning. There blooming on the wall were minerals that radiated pale light. It was like a crystal covered in indicolite. The girls were enchanted by the beautiful sight of the crystals.

“Oh, that’s Grantz Crystal. A one this big in size is rare.”

When talking about Grantz Crystal, it was like an ore that was like a jewel. The crystal did not have any special effects, but it’s cool and sparkling appearance is popular among the ladyship. Rings, earrings, pendants, and other jewelry have it set into them and it’s very well received. The jewel is one of the top 3 chooses for proposal rings.

“Lovely…”

Enchanted, Kaori’s cheeks blushed. Hajime and Shizuku were the only ones who noticed this.

“If that’s the case, I’ll retrieve it!”

The one who announced that and abruptly moved toward it was Hiyama. He approached the wall and quickly reached towards the crystal. Meld panicked at that.

“Kora! Don’t just do what you want! We haven’t confirmed if it’s

safe!”

Hiyama pretended not to hear and finally arrived in front of the crystal. Meld chased after Hiyama to stop him. At that moment, one of the knight finished his analysis with the Fair Scope. He paled at the result.

“Commander! It’s a trap!”

“Tsu!?”

However their warnings came too late. The moment Hiyama touched the Grantz Crystal, magic started to spread from the crystal. The trap was set for people who became so fascinated with the crystal that they would touch it carelessly. There’s a good story about this. It’s the way of the world.

In a blink of an eye, the magic circle spread throughout the whole room, and it gradually shined brighter. It was like a replication of the magic that summoned them.

“Withdraw! Get out of this room this instant!”

At Meld’s insistence, everyone started to clear the room in a hurry, but they weren’t fast enough. When the light filled the room, everyone momentary felt a floating sensation. The students felt the change in atmosphere. They were slammed onto the ground with a thud.

With the increasing pain on his butt caused by the fall, Hajime looked at the surrounding. Same as Hajime, his classmates fell on their backside. Meld, the knights, and Kouki’s party quickly stood up and observed their surroundings. Seems like the earlier magic was a transportation type magic. Since such magic was not possible with current magic, it was most likely an ancient magic.

They were all transferred onto a huge bridge made of stone. Approximately it was 100m in length. The ceiling looked to be about 20 m. There was no river passing by underneath the bridge, because of the darkness nothing else could be seen. It felt like there were in an abyss.

The width of the bridge was about 10m, but there were not even handrails. If you slipped there would be nothing to grab onto, and you would fall head-first. The group was right in the middle of the bridge. On both sides of the bridge, they could see a passage that led to a stairway that ascended to the upper level.

When he confirmed it, Meld issued out orders with a grim expression.

“You guys, get up there immediately, go towards the stairs. Hurry!”

Quickly the students moved. However, a trap in a dungeon was not going to be so easy, the retreat wasn’t that easy. Monsters emerged from the magic circles that appeared on both sides of the bridge. On one side was a huge monster. The other had a large amount of monsters.

Meld started at the huge demon and just whispered…

“No way…a Behemoth.”

Chapter 6 : Behemoth

[Traum is German for Dream]

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On both sides of the bridge, a magical formation that emitted crimson light appeared. The magic circle on the aisle side is close to 10 m. The one on the stairs side is around 1 m, but the numbers are numerous.

From the smaller countless magic circles came monsters that were sword-toting skeletons, these were called “Traum Soldier”. Their eyes were the same color as the magic circle, it sparkled and shine while they looked around. 100 Traum Soldier have already been summoned and yet the numbers were still increasing.

Even though there were so many skeleton Soldiers on this side, the other side’s monster was what caused Hajime’s danger sense to go haywire. From the 10 m magical circle, a quad pedal demon 10 m long with some sort of helmet on its head, spawned from it. If compared to any animal Hajime knew of, the closest would be a Triceratops. However, it’s eyes shone crimson, while percussing it’s sharp claws and fangs, flames gathered around the horns on its helmet.

Meld just whispered out “Behemoth”. At that moment, the Behemoth took a deep breath and let out a deafening roar.

“Gurua～a～a～aaaaa!!”

“Tsu!?”

The roar caused Meld’s senses to return, he quickly started to issue commands to everyone.

“Alan! Lead the students to the stair and break through those Traum Soldiers! Kyle, Ivan, Gale! I need you guys to extend the best barriers you can! Stop it! Kouki, hurry and get to the stairs!”

“Wait a moment, Meld-san! We’ll help! That dinosaur-like monster

is the most dangerous!? We'll…"

"Fool! That's a real Behemoth, at your current strength it's impossible! It's a 65th level demon. Once a long time ago, the "Strongest" known adventurer battled it and were unable to defeat it. Hurry up and go! I can't let you guys die!"

Even Meld's expression faltered for a moment at the daunting monster in front of him. "I can't just abandon you guys!" was Kouki's response as he stood his ground. At the moment when Meld tried to reason with Kouki to retreat, the Behemoth roared and started to charge at them. At this rate, the students who were retreating would get trampled to death.

To prevent it, the strongest of Haihiri's military spawned multiple full powered barriers.

"""Repel all Malice and Enmity, Absolute Providence from the Son of God, Herein a Sanctuary, You Shall Not Pass, "Absolute Virtue"""""

The magical formula for this spell was engraved in the highest quality paper 2 m wide. The incantation having 4 phrases to activate it. 3 of the Warrior's casted it simultaneously. A barrier manifested that could stop anything for 1 minute. The hemispherical barrier shined pure-white as it stop the Behemoth's charge.

The moment the Behemoth clashed with the barrier, a shockwave erupted from between them. The whole bridge shook at the shockwave, and everything around the Behemoth's feet were pulverized. The retreating students scream and tumbled at the artificial quake.

Traum Soldier were monsters that showed up on the 38th level. They were heads above anything they encountered so far. The students panicked as they were sandwiched by a monstrous demon in the back and an eerie army of skeletons in the front.

They advanced reckless, without giving care to keeping rank, and aimed for the stairs. Alan, tried to calm them down desperately, no

one listed because of the imminent terror. One of the school girls was pushed from behind and fell down. She groaned as she lifted her head to see before her a Traum soldier brandishing it's sword.

"Ah."

The soldier swung it's sword down towards her.

She thought she was going to die at that moment, but suddenly the Traum Solider feet were up heaved. Losing its balance the trajectory of the blade missed the girl and struck the ground instead. Furthermore, the upheaval continued like a wave towards the end of the bridge, tripping up many Traum Soldiers along the way. This caused some of the Soldiers to fall into the abyss.

2m off of the edge of the bridge in a crouched position was Hajime as he exhaled heavily. He was continuously transmuting the ground. Like a ground slide, the monsters on the bridge were guided off into the abyss. Unaware, his proficiency in transmuting got better because he constantly used it. The range of his transmuting also seemed to have increased.

While drinking a mana potion, Hajime quickly approached the girl that fell down. He helped the girl up. Hajime spoke to the still stunned girl with a smile.

"Hurry Forward. It's alright, if you calm down these skeletons are nothing. Because except for me, everyone else is a cheat!"

Hajime pat her on the back with full confidence, the next moment she uttered a quick energetic "Thank you".

Hajime had ruined the surrounding Traum Soldiers' footing and had them detained, he took that moment to survey the battlefield. Everyone was in such a panic that they were fighting without any thought and looked so sloppy. At this rate, it was highly likely that someone would die. Alan is still trying to organize them, but it is not going well. More reinforcements came for the Traum Soldiers through the new magic circles.

"We need a strong leader to guide us, Amanokawa-kun!"

Hajime started to sprint towards Kouki's party.

Behemoth was still repeatedly charging the barrier. A powerful shock-wave was produced everything it collided with the barrier, the bridge groaned at the pressure. There were already cracks in the barrier and it was only a matter of time before it gave. Meld had joined in the reinforcement of the barrier but it was like adding a drop into a bucket.

"Ah, Crap! It won't hold for much longer! Kouki, hurry and retreat! You guys go too!"

"No! I will not abandon you guys! We will all survive this!"

"Ku, to be so egotistical at this moment…"

Meld just displayed a sour face at their conversation. In such a narrow space, it would be very difficult to avoid the Behemoth's rush. Therefore, the best option was to withdraw because without the barrier they would be trampled. Such a subtle perception of the situation could only come with experience, it was highly unlike for Kouki and his party to have such an insight.

Meld was urging than to withdraw, but with a heavily summarized explanation on why. Kouki did not take his advise and refused to "abandon" them. Also from the look in Kouki's eyes he wanted to challenge the Behemoth.

It could be attributed to his adolescent mind. He was overestimating himself, because he had so much praise showered onto him.

"Kouki! Listen to what Meld is saying and retreat!"

Shizuku, who understood the situation, grabbed Kouki's arm in remonstration.

"This is not the first time Kouki is unreasonable! I'll back you up!"

"Thanks, Ryutaro!"

Ryutaro's statement just fueled Kouki's attitude even more. Shizuku

clicked her tongue at that.

“Don’t get intoxicated with the situation! Bakamono!”

“Shizuku-chan”

Kaori is worried for the irritated Shizuku.

A boy jumped out in front of Kouki.

“Amanokawa-kun”

“Na-Nagumo!?”

“Nagumo-kun!?”

Everyone was surprised by how serious Hajime was.

“Hurry and retreat! You have to help everyone!”

“Why so sudden? What are you even doing in a place like this? This is not a place you should be at! Just leave this to us, Nagumo…”

“Is this the situation to say such a thing?”

Hajime showed such unexpected force in his words that Kouki stopped his rebuke. Until now, they had never heard Hajime use such a harsh tone. He had always presented himself with a smile and now seeing such an image was shocking.

“Can you not see what is going on? Everyone is in a panic, because their leader is missing!”

Hajime pointed towards the students while one hand grabbed onto Kouki’s chest. In the direction he pointed at, there was his confused classmates being surrounded by Traum Soldiers. The training that was drilled into them was nowhere to be seen, they fought willy nilly. Since they were so inefficient they were being overwhelmed by the reinforcements. Although their high stats were protecting them for now, soon it would not matter.

“We need a blow that can break through them! A power to erase

the fear in everyone's hearts! And it's you who has such a power! Don't just look in front of you, look at what's going on behind you too!"

Stunned at seeing his classmates in chaos, the shaking Kouki nodded his head.

"I understand! I'll go immediately. Sorry, Meld-san!

"Go!"

The moment Meld looked back at Kouki's agreement to retreat, the barrier finally fell to the Behemoth's onslaught. The raging shock-wave caused by the destruction of the barrier, was shooting straight for Hajime and the others. Hajime quickly stepped forward and transmuted a wall, but it was easily brushed aside. It seemed he had weakened it. Dust whirled as the Behemoth bellowed out a roar.

On the ground was Meld and three of his knights groaning. Their body seemed to have taken damage from the shock-wave, they were unable to move. Kouki and his party had fallen over, but quickly they recovered. Hajime's wall had been useful for those behind Meld.

"Ryutaro, Shizuku can you buy me some time?"

Though they were in some pain, the two of them pressed forward at Kouki's request. Since Meld had been disabled, it was up to them to do something.

"I'll do what I can!"

"Somehow, I'll do it!"

Both of them rushed the Behemoth.

"Kaori, start healing Meld and his men."

"Okay."

Kaori quickly went to work. Hajime was already beside Meld. He quickly created a stone wall to prevent the affects of battle from

reaching them. Although it seemed useless when looking at the battle, it was better than nothing.

Kouki at the moment had been gathering himself and chanting to perform his best skill.

“Divine will! Perish all evils with your light! The breath of God! Blow away the ominous clouds and purify this world! The mercy of God! Forgive all sins with this strike! “Heaven’s Might”!”

An aurora gushed out from the “Holy Sword” after the chant. The skill was similar to the “Soaring Flash”, but it’s power was on a completely different level. It paved a gouge in the bridge as it shot towards the Behemoth, shaking the bridge with its might. After the chant, Ryutaro and Shizuku had already cleared out. However, after fighting the Behemoth they were in a tattered state. To suffer such a considerable amount of damage in such a short time.

The bombardment of light hit the Behemoth directly. Light filled the area where the spell had impacted with the demon. An earthquake resounded in the bridge, and cracks spawned all over it.

“If it’s this…Ha-a Ha-a”

“Did that do it?”

“I hope so.”

Ryutaro and Shizuku returned to Kouki’s side. Kouki breathed heavily after using such an enormous amount of magic. That skill earlier, was his trump card. Most of his magic was used to fuel it. Kaori had finished treating the fallen Soldiers and Meld was actively trying to stand up.

When the light and dust settled down…

There it was, an unscathed Behemoth.

The beast sent a death glare at Kouki and growled. It raised its head, there was a high pitch then it’s horns started to glow red hot. Magma, that word described perfectly what the Behemoth’s helmet looked like.

“Don’t just stand there! Move!”

Meld’s voice helped the them regain their senses and they started to move. The Behemoth soon rushed them with his newly powered helmet. Like a falling meteorite the Behemoth fell helmet first towards Kouki.

Even if they were able to avoid it by jumping aside, the shock-wave caused by the impact still blew them away. When they stopped rolling, they had wounds all over their bodies. Meld, who finally regained his movement, rushes over. The other knights were still being treated by Kaori. Bracing itself, the Behemoth worked to pull out his stuck head.

“Can you guys move?”

All he got in response were groans. They were probably paralyzed again by the shock-wave caused by the falling Behemoth. The damage to the internal organs seemed to be significant.

Meld called out to Kaori. When he was looking for Kaori, Meld’s sight caught hold of Hajime.

“Bozu! Take Kaori, Carry Kouki and retreat!”

For Meld who directed such instructions to Hajime, He would only be able to carry Kouki. That instruction indicated that, no one else would be able to escape. Meld clenched his teeth and prepared his shield. He had chosen to risk his life in this dangerous situation to hold back the beast.

At such a desperate moment for Meld, Hajime made a suggestion. This method may be the only way that everyone would be saved. However, the chance of it succeeding was very low. Hajime would also be in the most dangerous position.

Meld hesitated, but the Behemoth was already combat ready. It’s helmet started to sizzle red hot. They had no time.

“Are you going to do it?”

“I’ll do it!”

Meld could easily see the resolute gaze Hajime had, and he couldn't help himself from smiling.

"I can't believe that I'll entrust it up to you, I'll surely save you. Leave it to you!"

"Hai!"

Meld headed towards the Behemoth at that. He released a simple magic to provoke it. The Behemoth seemed to have a habit of targeting anyone who was attacking him at the moment. Man and Beast gazed at each other.

When the helmet was finally inflamed, it charged then leapt. Meld stood there poised, intending to provoke it till the last moment. At that moment, a small incantation could be heard.

"Blow "Wind Wall"!"

He back stepped at the same time as he chanted. Like a comet, the Behemoth landed at the area where Meld was previously stationed at. The "Wind Wall" was able to deflect the shock-wave and debris from the impact. Since it was just a simple attack, he was able to avoid it. He would have been totally annihilated if he was protecting Kouki.

Again, the Behemoth's head was stuck after the attack. Hajime advanced at this, but the remnants of the blazing heat burns Hajime. He endured the pain and he started to chant. It couldn't really be considered a chant because he just called out the spell's name.

"Transmute."

The Behemoth's movement to extract it's head from the stone was stopped because the surrounding stone buried its head. No matter how much stone it destroyed to free itself, Hajime just repaired it with his transmuting. Bracing it's legs, the Behemoth was going to forcefully free itself, but Hajime transmuted around the foot this time. He constantly harden and transmuted the stone and finally he sunk the beast 1 m into stone. The Behemoth's power was so

terrifying that if he let up for just a moment, cracks would from in the formation and it would try to slip out. In order to prevent this Hajime did not let up on his continuous transmuting. He observed the Behemoth struggling to get free with its head buried underground. For anyone else it would have looked very silly.

In the meantime, Kaori and the recovered knights were gathered and carried Kouki's party back. On the side with the Traum Soldiers, the students had regained some of their composure and started to cooperate with each other. The reason for the recovery was because of the girl Hajime saved earlier. A simple contribution from Hajime.

"Wait! There is still Nagumo-kun."

Kaori protested to Meld who was withdrawing.

"This is his plan! We are going to clear the Soldiers and make a safety zone for ourselves, and then we will bombard the beast with magic! Of course, we will allow him to retreat too! He can retreat when our magic barrage holds that beast in place, then we can retreat to the upper level."

"Then, I'll stay and help him!"

"Not possible! Your healing is needed to back up Kouki as we retreat!"

"But!"

Meld shouted at the protesting Kaori.

"Don't let his effort be in vain!"

"Tsu!?"

Including Meld, the other one with the highest power was without a doubt Kouki. If she did not use her healing magic effectively, they may eventually lack the power to stop the Behemoth. That is why it is necessary for her to join the retreating group. They did not have to time to stop and heal with other slower means, and if they were not fast enough Hajime will run out of mana to trap the Behemoth.

“Breath of Heaven, Fill to the brim, Purify and Heal, “Heaven’s Blessing”!”

Even if she had a face like she wanted to cry, she continued with her incantation. A pale light engulfed Kouki. The restorative property of her magic healed his body of injuries at the same time it enveloped him. Meld placed a hand on Kaori’s shoulder and nodded, and she nodded back. Again, Kaori turned around to look at the scene of Hajime transmuting against the Behemoth. All of them started to retreat after that.

The numbers of the Traum Soldier was still increasing. Currently, they numbered around 200. They all filled up the stair side of the bridge. But in a sense it might be a good thing. If a gap was present, the students would try to push through, but their lack of experience would lead them into getting surrounded and slaughtered. Actual this was a good number for the students who were having trouble with the 100 earlier.

Lucky, there had not been a single death, it was thanks to the earnest knights who protected them. It was not an exaggeration to say that they were desperately covering the students’ lives. The expense came in the form of all the wounds they had acquired.

If they lost the knights’ support, for the increasing number of students who were panicking and did not know the magic that caused the increasing monsters, they would fall apart in minutes.

Despair struck the students who realized it. The group that cooperated with the girl that Hajime saved earlier, even though they fought bravely their face conveyed that they were at their limits. When they thought it was finished…

“Soaring Flash!”

A pure-white slash exploded right through the ranks of Traum Soldiers. The Soldiers near the side edges of the bridge was blown into the abyss. After the slash thought, the remaining Soldiers filled in the gap that was created by the skill. They surely saw the stair that led to the upper level though. The wished to see it but it had been covered by the sea of swords.

“Everyone! Don’t give up, I’ll open up a path!”

He spewed those lines as the “Soaring Flash” tore through the enemies. The students energized at the charisma Kouki displayed.

“What have you guys been doing this whole time? Remember your training, and start cooperating with each other! Fools!”

The leader everyone relied on released a skill that was not inferior to “Soaring Flash” at the enemies. The reliably feeling returned to his voice. His body filled with power and his mind cleared. Kaori’s magic was doing their job, the magic to calm the mind. The magic was just a relaxation magic but combined with Kouki’s performance it was super effective.

Anyone with an aptitude for healing started to heal everyone. The people with high aptitude for magic made up the rear guard, they started their chants. The vanguard formed a firm rank, they steadily moved but put an emphasis in protecting the rear guard.

The knights who recovered also join them, then the signal for their counter-attack came. The cheat class started to perform their martial arts and magic, they descended down on their enemy like a surging wave. Monsters fell so quickly that they had finally passed the spawning rate of the magic circle.

Soon, the path to the stairs were opened.

“Everyone advance! We need to secure the stairs!”

Kouki started to run as soon as he shouted. The recovered Shizuku and Ryutaro accompanied Kouki in the charge. They cut through the encircling Traum Soldier like a hot knife through butter. Finally, they broke through the besiegement. Kouki quickly cast his magic to prevent the gap from the bridge they just created from being filled by the Soldiers.

The classmates looked doubtful. It will be like that. In front of them were the stairs, and naturally they wanted to get to safety quickly.

“Wait everyone! We still have to save Nagumo-kun! Just by himself, he has been suppressing that demon!”

Kaori's class faced her with a very doubtful expression. They all thought it was impossible, because they all thought he was useless. When the perplexed classmates looked over at the bridge, Hajime was really there.

"What is he doing?"

"That demon is buried!"

Meld answered the questions the students had.

"It's true! It was because of him stopping that demon that we could retreat! Vanguard don't let any soldier near us! Rear guard prepare your long range magic! He is about to run out of magic, we will have him retreat while we bombard the Behemoth!"

The students braced themselves when that voice resounded with them. There were people who looked at in the direction of the stairs in regret. No wonder, they just had a near death experience. They naturally wanted to get to safety as fast as possible. However, when Meld angrily shouted out to hurry up, they returned to the battlefield.

In there was Hiyama Daisuke. Although he thought so highly of himself, he was really scared, he wanted to run as fast as possible away.

At that moment, the scene from that day flashed in his mind. It was yesterday when they were staying in Horlad. He was so overcome by anxiety of the next day that he couldn't sleep properly and went out to get some air then headed for the toilet. The cool breeze relaxed him and he was returning to his room when he saw something. Along the way, he had seen Kaori in her negligee. This was the first time he had seen her in such a state and he instinctively hid and held his breath at such a sight. Kaori passed by without noticing him.

Daisuke was interested and followed her, until she stopped in front of a certain room and knocked. The one to answer the door was… Hajime. Hiyama's mind blanked at that. He liked Kaori, however he thought that he was not good enough for her. When comparing

himself to Kouki, he felt like he was way out of his league, so he gave up.

Hajime was different, Daisuke thought Hajime was inferior to him. So to find Hajime in the presence of Kaori was weird. He thought that if this was the case, why won't he do? Daisuke heard every word in his head, is his head alright? Hiyama seriously thought that though. His dissatisfaction against Hajime had always been piling up, now this had swelled into hatred. When he saw Kaori get mesmerized by the Grantz Crystal, he was probably driven by these feelings.

Hiyama remembered all that. Looking at Hajime who was suppressing the Behemoth by himself, Kaori staring worried for Hajime and even praying for him…a dark smile bloomed on Daisuke's face.

Hajime felt his mana running out, and he had ran out of any potions. He quickly surveyed his surrounding and noticed that everyone had retreated. Ranks were being formed and magic was being prepared for the last part of the plan.

Behemoth was still struggling, at this rate there were still a few seconds of intermission even if he stopped transmuting. In the meantime he had to get some distance. A drop of sweat entered his eye. Hajime had never been in such a situation that caused his heart to thump so loudly that he could hear it. Timing was going to be important here.

Dozens of cracks formed in the restraints that held the Behemoth, and they were failing to hold it back. At the same moment, Hajime started to sprint.

5 seconds after Hajime started to run away, the Behemoth fully freed itself and roared. The rage present in its eyes could never be misunderstood. Quickly it's vision searched for its sworn enemy and found Hajime. Behemoth roared in anger again , and collected power into its legs to chase after Hajime.

However, a barrage of magic attacks stopped it.

Like shooting stars painting the night sky, magic of countless colors bombarded the Behemoth. There was no damage, but the force prevented it from advancing.

Hajime lowered his head and dashed while taking care not to fall. With all those lethal spells passing over his head, Hajime was not afraid for his life. There was no way those cheats would be able to miss. The distance between the Behemoth and him was also 30m.

Hajime relaxed at that.

However, something happened that cause him to freeze.

One of the “Fireball” in the endless stream of spells, bent slightly and started to head his way. This was clearly aimed at him.

(Why!?)

Doubt and bewilderment, all of this ran through his brain and it appalled him.

Hajime slid and braced himself as the “Fireball” struck the ground right in front of his eyes. He was blown back the way he came from by the shock-wave. No real damage was taken because he was able to avoid a direct hit, but his sense of balance was thrown out of whack. Seems like semicircular canal was damaged.

Standing up was a little hard because he was dizzy. The Behemoth like usual was not going to go down alone. When Hajime got up, the beast roared again. Hajime looked at the Behemoth and was stunned by the piercing eyes it had. For the third time it’s horns started to and he lunged towards Hajime.

The unsteady head, hazy vision, looming Behemoth, impatience screams and roars from his classmates in the distance.

Hajime tried desperately to muster the strength to jump away. A furious shock ripped through the entire bridge, it shocked from the strength of the Behemoth’s attack. Cracks spread out from the epicenter. The bridge screamed.

Finally, after all that punishment, the bridge collapsed.

The bridge had finally reached the threshold and gave out.

“Guaaa!”

Behemoth clawed desperately to find a place to hold on to. However even the ground that connected the bridge collapsed and fell into the abyss. Death throes could be heard from the Behemoth.

Hajime crawled to escape somehow, however every place he held onto collapsed.

“Ah, it’s no good…”

While he thought that, he turned his gaze towards his classmates. He saw Shizuku and Kaori holding Kaori back, like she wanted to jump after him. His other classmates were pale and had their hands over their eyes or mouths. Meld and the Knights had a mortifying expression on their faces.

The scaffolding that held Hajime finally crumbled. He fell backwards into the dark abyss, while he tried to grasp the dimming light.

Chapter 7 : Wretched Malice

The death throes that the Behemoth echoed soon ceased. The stone bridge made a huge rattling noise as it crumbled. Hajime disappeared into the abyss along with the rubble. That sight, played for Kaori in slow motion and it filled her with despair.

In her head, last night's event repeatedly played in her mind. In the room illuminated by the moonlight, she sat here chatting with Hajime while they drank the fake black tea. That was the first time they had talked so in depth with each other. Being driven by her nightmares, she paid a sudden visit to Hajime. Even if he was surprised, he had talked to her truthfully. After a bit, she noticed that talking to him had erased her uneasiness.

She returned to her room in a jubilant mood. When she arrived back at her room, she noticed how boldly she was dress and she writhe in shame. Kaori felt depressed because Hajime had not even reacted, in her eyes, to her looks. She felt she had no appeal. When Kaori saw Shizuku caught her making funny facial expression, she wanted to pretend it never happened.

On that night, the most important occurrence was the promise she made to "protect Hajime". The promise that Hajime mentioned to relieve Kaori of her anxiety. Hajime disappeared into the abyss, as she stared at him. She kept recalling that memory over and over again.

Somewhere in the distance, a scream can be heard. When Kaori noticed that the voice belonged to her, she grimaced as she was quickly brought back to reality.

"Let me go! If I don't go to Nagumo-kun! I promised! I will…I said I will protect him! Let me go!"

Shizuku and Kouki had to restrain her, because Kaori looked like she would just jump after him. Kaori displayed such extraordinary power that they wondered where she got such power and how could she display such an amount with her slender body. Unlucky for them, she used that power to break free from them.

If she kept struggling like this, she might damage her body. Nevertheless, they could absolutely couldn't let her go. If they released her, she would jump off the cliff. She did not have her usual calmness, not even a shadow of it, now she had such a frantic expression. No, it might be heartbreaking to say.

"Kaori! You can't! Kaori!"

Because Shizuku could understand Kaori's feelings, she could not find the right words to say. All she could do was call out her name desperately.

"Kaori! Are you also trying to die? It's too late for Nagumo! Calm Down! You'll hurt yourself!"

Kouki tried to best to convey how worried he was of her. To the confused Kaori that was here and now, these were not the words to say to her.

"What do you mean "too late"? Nagumo-kun is not dead yet! If I don't go, he is surely asking for assistance!"

Nagumo Hajime was not savable, at least this is what everyone else thought. He fell from the cliff into that dark abyss. The composure to accept that reality, the present Kaori did not have it. If anyone was to word it though, she would just deny it over and over again. Ryutaro and the other students did not what to do, so they stood there flustered.

At that moment, Meld approached them and struck Kaori in the back of her neck without saying anything. She jerked for a moment, then unconsciousness claimed her. Kouki held the now limp Kaori, and glared at Meld. When he was about to start complaining, Shizuku preemptively bowed her head and said.

"I'm Sorry. Thank you."

"Don't…Don't thank me. I can't let another person die. We will wholeheartedly leave this Dungeon. I'll leave her to you."

"You don't even need to ask."

She watched him leave, she headed for Kouki and got him to hand Kaori to her. Kouki still had a disappointed expression on his face from being interrupted.

“Since we couldn’t stop her, Meld had to. You understand, right? We don’t have any time. Before her cries can start to affect everyone’s spirit, we had to stop her before she broke down. Hey, you have to lead the way. So we can all get out of this. This is what Nagumo-kun would have said.”

At her words, Kouki nodded.

“You are right, let’s hurry.”

They saw one of their classmate die in front of their eyes. This event had caused a lot of damage to be engraved into the students’ spirit. Everyone was looked at where the bridge used to be in a stupefied expression . There was a girl that said “No more!” and sat down. Just like Hajime had exclaimed, the group needed a leader right now.

Kouki raised his voice towards his classmates

“Everyone! Right now, just think about surviving. We have to withdraw!”

The students moved sluggishly in response to his words. The magical circles that spawned the Traum Soldier was still active. Their numbers increased one by one. At their current mental status fighting would be reckless, also it was not necessary to fight. Kouki shouted at his classmates to urge them to escape. Meld and his knights also tried to encourage the students.

Eventually, everyone escaped by the stairs.

The stairs to the upper level was long. It climbed so high that they could see nothing else but the stairs in the darkness. They felt like they had ascended 30 or more levels at that point. Even if their bodies were enhanced by magic, they would start feeling the fatigue soon. Wounds from their earlier battle was still present. It didn’t help that the stairs were long and dimly light, making the students

even more gloomy. At this moment, Meld considered having a small rest, but refrained when he saw a huge wall that had a magical formation drawn on it.

Students' faces started to regain their vitality. Meld quickly approached the wall and started to investigate it. They did not forget to use the Fair Scope. From their investigation, the chance of it being a trap is very unlikely. The carved magical formula's purpose was to move the wall in front of them. Meld started to chant to pour magic into the magical formula. Just like a hidden door used by Ninjas, the door rotated to open the way and showed the room behind it.

The revealed room was a room they had visited in the 20th floor.

"We returned?"

"We made it back!"

"We did it…we got back…"

One after another a sigh of relief escaped from the classmates. There were a few students that burst into tears and others who just fell on their ass. Even Kouki and his party that were leaning on the wall, wanted to sit down. They were still in a Dungeon though. Even if it was a low number level, they did not when a monster could appear. They had to escape the Dungeon before they could actually relax.

Meld had to suppress his longing to rest. He had to harden his heart as he shouted for the students to get up.

"You guys! Don't sit! If you get exhausted here, you won't be able to return! To avoid combat with any monsters we have to escape as quickly as possible. Hey, just endure it for a little more!"

For the students who wanted to rest more, they just stared in silent protest at him. The student reluctantly stood up while a bit dizzy. Kouki hide his fatigue and took point. On their way out, the knights concentrated on fighting as little amount of enemies as possible. They raced towards the entrance in one stretch.

Finally, they reached the 1st floor and saw the nostalgic entrance. They had not even stayed in the dungeon for a single day, many people felt it was such a long time since they had seen it.

This time the students really looked relieved after they exited the Dungeon. There were even students sprawled out in front of the gate square. All of them were pleased to have survived. Some of the students did not feel this way. Shizuku, who was still carrying the unconscious Karoi, Kouki, Ryutaro, Eri, Suzu, and the girl Hajime saved had a dark look.

Meld went to make a report at the reception area while minding the students with a side glance. There was a new dangerous trap on the 20th level. Since the bridge had collapsed, there was no way of knowing the purpose of the trap, but he still needed to report it. He couldn't help but report Hajime's death. Meld was having a hard time not showing his depression on his face. A sigh couldn't help but escape from him.

* * *

When the group returned to Horald, they returned to their rooms without much spirit. There were a few students that discussed with each other, but most of the students had already fallen asleep on their bed.

And then there was Hiyama Daisuke. Outside of the inn and located at a corner in the town he sat there. He choose an inconspicuous place to sit with his hands hugging his knees. Buried between his knees was his face that was very still. If his fellow class saw him, it would look like he was depressed that one of his classmates had passed. However…

"Hi, Hihihi. I-It was his fault! For a small fry…h-he got carried away…i-it was divine punishment. I'm not wrong…it was for Shirasaki's sake…that small fry…is not longer a concern…I'm not wrong…hihihi"

With his dark smile and dull eyes, he tried to justify himself.

The fireball that veered off course and hit Hajime was casted by

Hiyama. The escape to the stairs and rescuing of Hajime, the sight of Hajime and Kaori's night rendezvous, Hiyama heard a devil whisper to him. If I killed him now, no one will notice? At that moment he sold his soul to the devil.

To not be discovered, Hiyama timed his shot very carefully and lead his fireball to Hajime. In that chaotic barrage it would be very difficult to work out who casted what. He chose the fireball because his aptitude was wind. There would be no evidence or any suspicion. Hiyama told all of this to himself as gave off a dark laugh.

Someone at that moment called out to him.

"Heh, it really was you. The first murder from another world is a fellow classmate…you did quite well!"

"W-Who?"

Hiyama backed away in a panic. The one who hailed him was a classmate he knew.

"Y-You, what are you doing here?"

"Don't worry about such a thing. Rather than that…Murder-san? How do you feel right now? How does it feel to kill off a love rival in midst of the confusion? "

That person laughed a little. Like he had just seen a comedy. Hiyama said to himself, one classmate did die, yet this person did not care. All the other classmates were shocked and looked miserable, but this person had no such expression on his face, not even a speck.

"Is this your true nature?"

The stunned Hiyama muttered out. A condescending scoff could be heard from the person.

"Nature? It's not anything complicated like that. Isn't it common to have a few secrets? More important that that…what would happen if I spread this to everyone? Especially…if she heard it."

“S-Such a thing…No one would believe…and the evidence?”

“None, but they would believe my words. At that moment, do you think your words would be good enough?”

Hiyama was cornered. The words was used to teased the already weakened mouse. No one would have imagined that this fellow could be like this. Daisuke still couldn’t believe that this person had a split personality. The person looked down at Daisuke with a sadistic expression that sent chills throughout his body.

“What do you want?”

“Regrettable. It would seem like I’m threatening you, isn’t it? Fufu. It’s not like I want something from you right now. For now, all you have to do is be my hands and feet. ”

“Such a thing…”

It was something like a slave declaration. Naturally, Hiyama hesitated at that. He wanted to refuse, but if he did then this person would mercilessly spread the rumor about his deeds. The conflicted Hiyama thought, “Still working with this person is better than imprisonment.” This character foresaw Hiyama’s conflict and decided to tempt him.

“Don’t you want Shirasaki Kaori?”

“W-What did you say?”

Hiyama’s gloomy thoughts were blown away in an instant and just stared at the person. This individual smirked at Hiyama’s stunned visage, and continued with the temptation.

“If you follow me…someday you will obtain her. I was going to approach Nagumo-kun with this offer, but you killed him. You may be more suited for what I have in store, so I guess it all worked out in the end. ”

“…What’s your objective? What do you want to accomplish?”

In this situation he was ignorant of, he unknowingly raised his

voice.

“Fufu, it has nothing to do with you. I’m searching for something, that’s all I’ll say…So, your answer?”

Hiyama did not want to disturb him and just filed away the person attitude of treating him like an idiot into his memory. Daisuke was very afraid of this transformation of character, he did not have much choice so he just nodded his head.

“…I’ll obey.”

“Ahahaha, that’s good. Having to prosecute my own classmate would be painful. Well, let’s get along, Murder-san! Ahahaha”

Hiyama just watched the person return in the direction of the inn while they laughed happily, a small “damn” escaped from his lips.

Even if he wants to forget, just being in denial will not erase it, this scene would stick to him. The expression Kaori had when Hajime fell into the abyss. What kind of words would articulate her feelings?

Right now, while all those dead tired students slept likes logs. Hajime’s death at the abyss helped discern Kaori’s feelings. Kaori never took care of Hajime just for good will. When looking at the exhausted Kaori, this would apply awareness to the cause. Hiyama jeopardized himself by performing such a careless act.

He must conduct himself well. In order to secure one’s place. Hiyama had already crossed the line. It wasn’t possible to stop now. According to that individual, There was a possibility of him disappearing and a possibility that he would get Kaori.

“Fufu, It will be alright. Everything will go well. I’m not wrong…”

Hiyama returned to his previous position and started to mumble again. This time not a single person bothered him.

Chapter 8 : Abyss

Gore Warning.

* * *

Zaa-the sound of running water. A cool breeze brushed against his cheeks and caused him to tremble. There was a solid sensation in contact with his face and a chill pierced his lower half of his body. Hajime raised a groan as he work up.

Absentmindedly, he put forth effort to sit upright while his whole body scowl as it throbbed with pain.

“Ow, This is…For sure I…”

Holding his unsteady head with one hand, he studied the vicinity whilst he recalled his memories. Even though the surrounding was dim, thanks to the emission from the green light stones, it was not like he was blinded by the darkness. In front of Hajime was a river about 5 m in width, and it was in this that his lower body was submerged in. Hajime’s upper body seems to have been caught and stranded by protruding rocks located at the side of the river.

“Yeah…I fell down the broken bridge…thereupon…”

His head that had a fog clouding his mind finally started to turns its gears again. Hajime must have survived the drop by sheer luck. In the middle of his fall he encountered area where the cliff had a puncture, from this leak water sprouted out like a flood. There were numberless waterfalls here, and these waterfalls blew away Hajime time after time until gradually he was thrust to the wall. At the very end he was pushed out of a tunnel that was like a waterslide. It was an unbelievable miracle. When he was flying out of the tunnel Hajime hit his head and lost consciousness. Personally, Hajime did not know how such a miracle took place.

“Anyway, I was saved…Achoo! I-It’s cold.”

He was submerged in the cold underground water this whole time,

because of this his whole body was completely cold. At this rate there was a possibility that he could catch hypothermia, Hajime quickly picked himself up. Trembling and shivering he took off his clothes and wringed them.

Using his transmutation he created a single sheet of paper. On the hard stone floor he started to engrave a transmutation circle.

“It’s too cold to concentrate…”

He wanted a “Spark” magic. This was a simple magic that even children could perform with a 10 cm magic formation. At this moment, there was no magic stones to increase the efficiency of the magic because Hajime needed it with his zero aptitude for magic. Hajime would have to make a complicated formula that would be 1 m in diameter to cast that “Spark”. After 10 minutes he was able to finished the magic formation and started his chanting to activate it.

“I seek fire,The power of light, Manifest, “Spark”…Why is there such an exaggerated chant just to create an ordinary flame? So embarrassing…Ha-a.”

The sighing seems to have become a habit recently. Still he invoked the fist-sized flame and bathed in its warmth. He set his clothes side by side near the flames to dry it.

“I wonder where this is…I think I fell a considerable height…can I return?”

Warming himself with the flame, he could feel himself calm. Gradually anxiety started to fill his heart. Hajime really wanted to cry, tears even started to accumulate in his eyes , but he bore with it because if he cried now he would fall apart. He wiped away the tears that had collected and slapped his own cheeks.

“Got no other choice, I have to find a way back. It’s fine, I’m sure it will be fine.”

Hajime’s face developed into a determined one after he muttered encouragements to himself, all while staring at the flames.

After about 20 minutes the clothes were dry and warm, so Hajime

set off. Hajime was not sure which level he was in but for sure he was still in the Dungeon. It wouldn't be strange to have monsters lurking. He carefully proceeded to walk down into a huge passage that lead into the depths.

The passage that Hajime continued on felt like a cave. Rather than a low-rise square passage, the passage had rocks and walls protruding in many places and it winds around complicatedly. It was similar to the last room on the 20th floor, the only difference was the size. The complicated passage full of obstacles was 20 m in diameter. Even the more narrow places was still 10 m in diameter. Although it was not an easy path to treat, there were a lot of places to hide and Hajime advanced stealthily from hiding area to hiding area.

He wondered how much he walked. Hajime started to feel tired, until he finally reached a fork for the first time. A huge crossroad was presented to him. Behind the boulder was Hajime hiding, he wondered which path he should take.

A moment was taken to think over it. He thought he saw something at the edge of his vision and he quickly hid behind a rock. Quietly he stuck his head out and waited to see. From the passage straight ahead, a white fur ball hopped into view. It had long ears, and it looked like a rabbit. However, it was about the size of a mid-sized dog and its hind legs were heavily muscled. The "rabbit" also had several dark red lines running along its body like blood vessels, the lines also pulsated like a heart. That was very creepy.

Clearly, it was a dangerous demon. Hajime decided to avoid by going left or right instead of going straight. It looked like he wouldn't be able to proceed to the right because the "rabbit" was near it. Hajime held his breath and waited for the time to move. At that moment, the rabbit turned around and started to sniff the ground. Right now! He tried to move at that.

The rabbit seemed to react to that and it quickly straighten its back to stand up. It's vigilant ears rustled.

(Crap! D-Did it find me? I-I'm fine?)

He clung his body to the boulder to hide himself, and he tried to

gain control of his thumping heart. Those keen ear felt like they could pick up his throbbing heart, he broke out into a cold sweat at that thought.

Luckily, it was a different reason the rabbit was alert.

“Guru~ua!”

A wolf-like demon with white hair jumped out and growled at the rabbit. The white wolf had two tails and was about the size of a large dog. Just like the rabbit, the wolf had the same palpitating dark red lines all over its body. After that wolf jump out, two more wolves jumped out from behind different stones to join it.

Hajime peeked his head out and observed the situation. No matter how you look at it, the wolves were going to prey on the rabbit-chan (though it wasn’t cute enough to attach chan). With the cover of confusion Hajime half rose his feet. However…

“Kyu!”

A cute cry leaked from it and jumped into the air with a rotation. The rabbit gave a roundhouse kick with its massive legs and smacked the first wolf.

Dopan

The kick generated a sound that wasn’t thought possible. Rabbit-chan’s got a clean kick to the wolf’s head.

Gogya

There was a resounding echo and Hajime could see that the wolf’s neck had been bent into the wrong direction.

Hajime went rigid at that display. Using the centrifugal force from the roundhouse kick, the rabbit rotated in the air until it was in an upside-down state. The rabbit stomped the air and fell towards the ground like a meteor. Just before landing, it rotated itself perpendicular to it and gave a powerful heel drop to the wolf close to the landing point.

Begya

Without even getting the chance to give off a death throe, both the wolves heads were pulverized. Another two wolves appeared to jump at the rabbit when it landed. Hajime thought it was this moment that the rabbit would lose. The rabbit was able to do a handstand while rotating his legs, just like a break dancer. Both of the wolves were flung towards and slammed against it because of the tornado like rotating kicks. Blood splashed against the walls and their corpse trailed down.

The last wolf ruffled its tail as it growled. Soon the tails started to discharge electricity. It was trying to cast a Special Magic.

“Guru-ua!”

Lightning fly at the rabbit with a howl. As the high-speed lightning approached, the rabbit avoided it splendidly by performing zigzagging steps. When the lightning dissipated the rabbit drove a somersault kick into the wolf’s jaw in one go. The kick blew the wolf away and it landed on the ground backwards and bent. It seemed like its neck broke from the force.

“Kyu!”

A victory cry? The rabbit raised its forelimbs and brushed off its ears.

“Mommy, tell me it’s a lie.”

Hajime who was still stiff can only give a dry smile. Isn’t this dangerous? The Traum Soldier that the students had trouble with looked like toys compared to this bunny. This rabbit may be stronger than the Behemoth, who could only do simple monotonous attacks.

He knew that if he was caught it would be certain death, this fretting caused him to unconsciously step back. That was an error.

Karan [Tap]

That noise echoed throughout the whole cave. Hajime had kicked a

pebble near his feet that fell and created that racket. Such a cliché grave mistake. A large amount of cold sweat streamed down his face. The rabbit turns its head like a machine that wasn't oiled to the sound.

Hajime was definitely seen.

It's ruby red eyes narrow as it caught sight of Hajime. He froze like a frog hypnotized by a snake. Alarms bells started to go off in his head and his soul told him to run for his life, but his body did not listen to him.

Finally, the rabbit that had only been looking back at Hajime with his head, orientated its whole body towards him. It started to pour energy into its legs.

"It's coming!"

He instinctively knew that. Rabbit demon exploded towards him, it dashed at him at an absurd speed that left afterimages behind it.

When he noticed it, he jumped aside with all his might.

The place where he was just at exploded like a cannonball had just struck it. It gouged out the ground as it detonated. Hajime rolled while the earth rumbled, and stopped with his backside on the floor. He retreated from the epicenter with a pale face.

Slowly the rabbit stood up with a slack attitude, after it continued its assault. Hajime quickly constructed a stone wall with his transmutation. Stone wall met the rabbit's kick and easily the kick pierced through it. By pure reflex he brought up his left arm to block. Good thing his face was not crushed, but the impact launched him to the ground. Pain coursed through his left arm when he gathered himself.

"Augh"

When he looked at his left forearm, it was broken and bent in a funny angle. Looks like it was totally crushed. Crouching in pain, he desperately sought out the rabbit. What he found was the rabbit walking in a relaxed manner, a total inverse of its earlier attitude. It

must have been his imagination, but its eyes were staring at him in a condescending. Looks like it was having fun messing with him.

Since he was on his backside, he couldn't even retreat that well. There standing in front of Hajime was the rabbit. It looked down on him, like he was some worm crawling on the earth. The rabbit brandished its foot to show it off.

(…I wonder if this is the end…)

Despair assailed Hajime. He adopted a dazed looked and gave up as he stared at the rabbit's feet. Eventually the kick of instant death was swung.

Hajime shut his eyes, horrified at the impending doom.

…

No matter how much time passed, the expected blow never came. He fearfully opened his eyes and in front of his face was the rabbit's foot. The kick was stopped just before it made impact. It can't be, was it still playing with him and trying to instill even more anguish in him? Hajime noticed something though, when he looked closely the rabbit was trembling.

(W-What? Why is it trembling…it seems scared…)

No, not "seem", it really was afraid. Hajime tried to run for the right passage, but he caught sight of a new demon.

Huge, was a word that could describe it. The beast was 2 m tall and its whole frame covered in white fur. Like all the other monsters he met here, this beast also had pulsating dark red lines wrapping its body. If he could compare it to another animal then a bear came to mind. One differences were that its arm extended all the way down to its feet, and these arms had 3 claws protruding out almost 30 cm.

Before he knew it that bear was nearby, while it glared at its prey. Silence surrounded the area. Both Hajime and the rabbit was frozen and could not move. No, would not move. Just like how Hajime was earlier. The bear's stare had stopped them.

“…Gururu.”

Tired of the situation, the bear started to growl.

“Tsu!”

This caused the rabbit to return to reality. It quickly turned tail and instantly retreated at top speed. All that speed it used to crush its enemies was now being used to escape. Too bad it was all for naught.

Using speed that didn’t suit its size, the bear aimed it’s sharp claws at the rabbit. The rabbit used its agility to twist his body to dodge the blow. Hajime was certain the bear’s claws had missed their target, and he saw the rabbit finish dodging.

When it landed, blood started to gush from its body as multiple cut wounds emerged on its body. More and more blood poured out of its wound until Hajime noticed that its body wasn’t whole anymore. Piece by piece sections of the rabbit slipped off in different direction and a fountain of blood sprayed when the largest section was set free.

The gore show disgusted Hajime. A rabbit demon that powerful was taken down so easily without it being able to do anything. Now he knew why it was so scared. That bear demon was extraordinary. This guy would destroy any person Hajime knew of.

Lumbering its huge body, the bear approached the fresh corpse. Sounds of gorging could be heard from the bear.

Hajime could not move. Still consumed by fear, the beast eyes pin down Hajime with its eyes.

Nothing was left of the rabbit after the bear took 3 mouthful of it. It turned around and growled at Hajime. The beast’s eyes said it all, “You are next.”

Presented with the eyes of a predator all he could do was despair.

“Uwaaa-” [Ah!]

Hajime ran the opposite direction of the bear while screaming madly and forgetting about his broken arm.

If something like that rabbit couldn't escape then it did not look good for Hajime. The wind howl and from his left he felt pain explode in his body as he was flung against the wall.

"Gah!"

The blow had knocked all the air out of his lungs. He trailed down the wall as he collapsed into a fit of coughs. Hajime was swaying from the impact but he kept his eyes on the bear. Then he noticed the bear was chewing on something.

What the hell was it chewing on? The rabbit was already consumed. Somehow the arm it was eating was very familiar. Hajime was confused at the event, because he felt lighter on his left side. To be precise, his left arm…

"A-Are?" [What]

Hajime's face stiffened. Why is there no arm? Why was blood spurting out? He tilt his head. Hajime could not make sense of what happened. The reality of the situation finally hit him. Pain was the reminder that this was no dream.

"Ahhhhhhh!!!!"

His shriek echoed in the passage. Everything below his left elbow had disappeared.

The beast still had its Special Magic. His three claws were able to create blades of wind that could extend up to 30 cm. If you thought about it losing just one arm was fortunate. The bear was playing with Hajime and it begged the question if Hajime was lucky. Considering that the rabbit earlier had been dealt with so quickly.

After he was finished with his meal, the bear advanced towards Hajime. His eyes was not condescending like the rabbit's. The beast just looked at Hajime as food.

The beast extended its forelimbs toward Hajime. It looked like it

was going to eat Hajime alive.

“A, A, Guu, Re “Rensei”!” [Transmute]

While tears and mucus flowed, drool escaped from his mouth, he transmuted the wall with his only arm. It was an unconscious action. The only power that was available to the Hajime that had such low specs. Using magic that is usually only used to process weapons. This class was without a doubt a crafting class. Thought of as useless in combat, but another worlder showed the knights a new application for its skill. A skill that saved the lives of his classmate. On the brink of death, he choose to rely on that skill, and it answered him with a means of escape.

A hole 50 cm in height, 120 c in width, and 2m in depth formed in the wall. Hajime rolled into the hole and narrowly escaped the bears paws reaching towards him.

It was overwhelmed with anger from losing a prey.

“Guruaa!!”

The beast casted its Special Magic while it roared. It aimed its magic towards the hole Hajime made. A terrible destruction followed as the wall was shaved off my the powerful claws.

“Ahhhh-! “Rensei”! “Rensei”! “Rensei”!”

Pancing from the monster that was gradually getting closer, Hajime started to continuously cast his transmuting and delved deeper into the wall. He did not even bother to look back. Recklessly he repeated the magic, and advanced with a crawl. All his pains or any other thoughts were put in the backseat. Mana was consumed over and over again as his survival instinct had control over him.

How much did he progress? Hajime did not know, but he couldn’t hear the terrible sounds. In reality, he did not progress that much. Each cast of his “Rensei” allowed him to advance 2 m (This was twice as strong as his earlier days). The main problem was his bleeding, he would not be able to move soon.

His awareness was already gone from the excessive bleeding. Still

his body pushed forward.

“”Rensei”… “Rensei”… “Rensei”… “Rensei”…”

No matter how many times he chanted, the wall did not change. His magic ran out before his body gave out. Exhausted, his hands fell from the wall.

Hajime fell on his back and his last strand of consciousness was going out. He just aimlessly started to the heavens, but all he saw was darkness.

Hajime at this time recalled some past memories. It was like a Revolving Lantern(*). His life flashed before his eyes. His nursery and elementary school, middle school, and high school days. Various memories flooded his mind until his last memory. In that bedroom illuminated by the moonlight. The chat he had with a goddess and the promise they made. Her smiling face.

[* Revolving Lantern is a show where a lantern has some cutouts done in them and in the center a candle or light source is placed. The shadow casted by the light and cutouts could provide a show. Usually the light is directed to one direction so a story could be told.]

After remembering that beautiful sight, the darkness engulfed him. Just before sleep claimed him, he felt a drop of water on his cheek. Like someone had shed a tear for him.

Chapter 9 : Complete Change

Drip…Drip…

Hajime felt his consciousness return gradually as the drips of water hit his cheeks and entered his mouth. Wondering what was the cause, he slowly opened his eyes.

(…I'm alive?…I'm saved?…)

Attempting to get up, he was stopped when his forehead hit the low ceiling of the hole.

"Aku!?"

He totally forgot about the hole he constructed that was only 50 cm high. Hajime extended his hand to the ceiling to transmute a higher ceiling. Only one arm came into view. He remembered he lost his left arm, and felt phantom limb pains. At that he kept his left arm down, or what remained of it. There was swelling around the wound but it had closed.

"H-How?…There is so much blood…"

He couldn't see in the darkness, but if he had some light he would be able to see the pool of blood. The amount of blood he lost would have normally killed someone. To survey the surrounding he felt around with his hand and felt something slimy. His blood was still there and it had yet to dry. After All, it seemed he had bled, and it seemed not much time had passed since he fainted.

While he was wondering about his wound, another drop of water hit his cheeks. The moment it entered his mouth, he felt his body reenergize.

"…No way…was it this?"

Using his hand he performed a transmutation on the area where the droplet came from, while he ignored his phantom limb pains. Progressing further and further in as he transmuted a little lightheaded. Mysteriously when he drank the liquid his mana

returned and no matter how much transmuting he performed his mana did not run out. Hajime repeatedly transfigured to find the water source.

Eventually the amount of mysterious liquid increased and more trickling could be heard. Hajime finally reached the source.

“This…is…”

An ore the size of a basketball emitting a light existed there. This ore was buried and assimilated with the surrounding rocks, and it dripped the liquid. A beautiful and mysterious stone. The ore was emitting darker blue than aquamarine, at least that was the best representation he could think of. His phantom limb pain was left forgotten.

Fascinated with the stone, Hajime reached out to touch it with his mouth. The dull pain and haze that his body and mind felt was cleared, and the fatigue disappeared. Seems like the liquid from this stone had saved him. The liquid seemed to hold restorative powers. Phantom limb pains still occurred, but the other injuries or negative effects were healed.

Hajime didn’t know, but this stone was the highest grade treasure called “God’s Crystal”. The crystal is a legendary relic thought to have been just a story. Formation of such a crystal is a miracle, because it was the crystallization of magical pools that collect by chance and needed 1000 years to form. Looking over it, the crystal was about 30-40 cm in diameter. After it has crystallized, it takes several hundred more years to saturate it to cause overflowing. That overflowing liquid is called “Sacred Water”, and when drank it could cure any injury or disease. Though it doesn’t have the power to regenerate parts, and it is considered a fountain of youth if continuously taken. A story of Eht healing people with this sacred water in ancient time is often recited.

He noticed that he returned from the brink of death. Hajime who was leaning on the wall sagged down. Bring up both knees, he placed his head between them while shivering from his close brush with death. He had no energy to even try to escape, his heart was broken.

Hajime might confront hostility and malice. Any rescue would be appreciated, and he might be able to stand up again. However, that bear's eyes scared him. He did not want to encounter the eyes of a predator that wanted to devour him. Eyes that he had no experience with because he was used to being the top law of the jungle. Those eyes were responsible for why his arm was eaten and this broke his heart.

"Some…help me…"

In this abyss, his voice did not reach anyone…

* * *

What did he do?

Hajime was laying on his side curled up into a fetus position.

Four days have passed since his collapse. All this time he had not moved much and the sacred water had sustained him. The sacred water could keep a person alive except for extreme circumstances, and it did not ease any hunger pangs. He wasn't going to die, but he was suffering from phantom limb pains and starving sensation.

(How did I end up like this?)

A question he asked himself over and over again. His mind had recovered from drinking the sacred water, even if he suffered from pain and hunger. Unfortunately, because he had a clear mind, all the suffering was clearly felt.

One day Hajime stopped drinking the sacred water.

(If this anguish continues for so long…I rather…)

After he muttered that, he fell unconscious.

Three days passed. The hunger that calmed had returned. His phantom limb pains did not subside.

(Still…I'm not dead…I don't want to die…)

Although he wished for death, a part of him still wanted to live. Conflicting thoughts alternated within his mind. He could no longer form any normal thoughts. His murmurs became incoherent and delirious.

Three more days elapsed. The sacred water was losing its efficiency, at this rate two more days and he would most likely be dead. He had not taken in fluids, let alone food.

Abnormalities started to appear in Hajime's mind recently.

(Why do I have to suffer…What did I do…)

(Why did this happen…What's the cause…)

(God unreasonably abducted me…)

(A classmate betrayed me…)

(The rabbit looked down on me…)

(That guy ate me…)

Gradually his thoughts became darker. Who was wrong? Who forced their unreasonableness onto him? Who harmed him? Pain gradually turned into rage, rage led to hatred, he seeked an enemy. Everything had worked into corrupt his spirit. The severe pain and starvation that wrecked his body, and the events that led him here into this endless darkness.

(Nobody has come to rescue me…)

(If nobody is going to help me, what should I do?)

(How do I rid myself of this pain?)

Day 9. Hajime thoughts had made a breakthrough about his current situation. With a heart that wanted release from its torment, he needed to first expel the unnecessary hatred and anger. Because the suffering did not end when his heart turned black…

(What…am I wishing for?)

(I wish for “life”.)

(What type of people impedes me?)

(My enemies)

(Then what should I do?)

(I-I…)

Day ten. His heart was now free of hatred and anger. The outrageous God, back-stabbing classmate, hostile demons, the smiling person desiring to protect him, all of them mattered naught. To live, to earn the privilege to survive, everything else was trivialities. Hajime had arrived at an answer for his question.

That is…

(KILL)

Not for malice, animosity, or hate. In order to live, he will kill with pure intent.

All those who threaten his survival are enemies, and to my enemies…

(KILL, KILL, KILL,

A new Nagumo Hajime came into existence. A Nagumo Hajime that would ruthlessly eliminate any who stood in his way of survival. His broken heart broke again. This new heart however was not a weak heart that was roughly patched up. No, his new tough heart was re-forged by the fires of agony, despair and darkness.

Hajime starts to move his completely weakened body. For the past few days he had slurped on the accumulated sacred water like a dog given a drinking bowl. The hunger or phantom limb pain did not disappear, but it revitalized his body.

His eyes shined glaringly, his watery mouth needed to be wiped and his face broke out into a fearless grin. The canines in his warped mouth gained a glint. Certainly his expression had a sudden change just like his thoughts. Hajime arose to proclaim a transmutation and he muttered again…

“KILL”

* * *

In the labyrinth there was a pack of two-tailed wolves. A pack of wolves usually consisted of 4-6 members. Because they were the weakest demon on this level, they compensated by cooperating in a group. The group Hajime saw was no exception, they totaled four in number.

Cautiously, he observed his surroundings from his hiding spot near the wall and waited for the best hunting ground. The most fundamental hunting method was setting up an ambush. He let the wolves wander for a while until the perfect ambush site was discovered, this site had rocks covering the four corners. Now he waited for the prey to come. The moment one of them showed up, it was going to get butchered by being sandwiched by a rock and the wall. Hajime was practically salivating at the thought of his prey, until he felt something was off.

Since their most important survival tool is their cooperation, they had an almost telepathic link with each other. Packmates would not be able to directly communicate with each other, but they would somehow know where each were and what they were doing.

However, something was something wrong. They were gathered into a group of four but somehow the leader could only sense three left among them. One of the wolves' signature that was at the opposite side of the wall disappeared.

It harbored doubts, when he put in the effort to raise from his prone position, it heard one of its packmate scream. Restlessness was conveyed from one wolf that was near the companion that disappeared. The comrade was caught and stuck between something and could not slip out. Two wolves on the opposite side rushed up to rescue him. However, the sign of that struggling animal disappeared.

Confused, it quickly went to the wall and checked the area, but nothing was there. The remaining two puzzled wolves used their noses to sniff around the area the two other wolves disappeared from to get a hint.

At that moment, the ground depressed, and the walls protruded out to cover them. When they were about to jump aside, the depressed floor suddenly reverted back to its original state. This would make escaping the trap an easy task for the wolves. If it had not been confused with encountering such a new experience, they would not have been caught so easily. The assailant had already planned for their confusion and that single moment of hesitation. That was a good enough opportunity to catch them.

"Guru-ua!?"

The two wolves screamed as the walls swallowed them…then nothing was left.

Hajime was the one to catch all four of those wolves. Fighting back with determination, he was able to oppress his hunger and phantom limb pains. The sacred water had sustained him so far, it was a good thing he trained earnestly repeatedly his transmuting and mana capacity.

His transmuting was more quick, more accurate and more extensive now. If he went out right now, he might die. He had accumulated training when he was in the room with the God's Crystal. Hajime

wanted to polish his weapon even if slightly, and of course his weapon is transmutation.

Even if it was possible for him to endure the pains, they still assaulted him. These pains were probably what made Hajime concentrate to such an extreme manner.This allowed him to perform several times faster than normal, and his transmuting range was three meters now. Of course he did not have an earth attribute magic that could be used offensively.

He had a small container filled with sacred water and started to look for his enemies. Using his transmuting he was able to find the four wolves. Hajime decided to tail them. Many times he was almost found out, but he was able to lose their trail by hiding in spots he constructed with his transmuting. That was when he sprang his trap and using his transmuting he dragged them into the wall.

“Now what? My transmutation has no direct killing power. Both the speed and power of my transmuting did not seem to be enough to kill the demons.”

Hajime looked through a tiny peep hole with his glistening eyes. The motionless pack growled while they were in the wall.

Looked like he was right, the wolves had not died. Previously, he had attacked them with the splintering stone but it seemed that there was not enough power and speed to harm them. This was probably because of the earth here. His magic was only used to process minerals, so using such a power to kill seemed to be out of reach. Thus, restraining them was the best he could do.

“I wonder if I should suffocate them…but I can’t wait for that.”

Hajime’s eyes started to grin as it gained a predatorial glint. He press his right arm against the wall and casted his magic. A piece of stone was cut off and slowly he transfigured it while he concentrated on an image. When it was done the stone had been turned into a thin spiral spear. Furthermore, it had other parts added on to it, like a handle.

“Now then, to dig!”

The spear was stabbed towards the ground where the wolves resided. Hard fur and skin made contact with the tip of the spear.

“After all I can’t stab you. That confirms my hypothesis.”

Why didn’t he use a sword or knife? Because it is widely known that the stronger the demon the harder it becomes. There were a few exceptions to it. Hajime had studied a lot to overcome his uselessness and from what he had gathered a normal sword or knife would be useless against these guys.

Thus, Hajime started to rotate the handle on the spear. The spear spiraled to match Hajime’s actions. He was using this spear as a drill to pierce through the demon’s hard skin.

Applying his weight to turn it, and eventually it started to slowly dig into the beast’s skin.

“Guru-aa!!”

The wolf screamed.

“Does it hurt? I won’t apologize. I’m doing this to live. Don’t you guys eat me too? We both feel the same.”

While talking, he had constantly been rotating the drill. The wolf tried to struggle desperately, but it was impossible because it had not a single gap to work against.

Finally, the drill had broken through its tough skin layer. The drill mercilessly destroyed the wolf’s innards. A death cry escaped from its mouth. It screamed for a bit but soon it twitched for a bit and finally stopped moving.

“Alright, let’s secure the food first.”

Laughing gleefully, he butchered the other three in the same manner. When he was done, the carcasses was recovered using transmutation. The fur on them was removed with some trouble, he only had one hand.

His hunger stimulated his desire to consume.

Chapter 10 : Weapon Creation

In the darkness, the light stones illuminate the surrounding area.

The light projected a few shadows. One of the shadows, provided a silhouette of someone crouching in front of a beast while chewing could be heard.

“Augh, Guu, This seriously sucks.”

Hajime ate the wolf meat with a curse. The meat was very tough, and blood dripped off as he took a bite and swallowed. This had been his first meal for the past weeks. The stomach was surprised to suddenly receive the meat. Pains shot through his body at the stomach’s protest. Hajime knew he would get such a response and ignore it to keep eating.

His appearance looked so feral. If any of the civilized humans saw what was going it they would be repulsed. The disgusting smell and taste would cause them to lose their appetite. Hajime did not even consider such a thought because he was happy to have a meal. He continued to eat in a daze.

After eating so much of this meat that his belly swelled and drinking the sacred water that the Church of Saints would be envious of. An unusual phenomenon struck his body.

“Ah?…Augh!?”

An intense pain suddenly wracked his body. Erosion, that was the best word to describe what horrible sensation he felt going through his body. The pain intensified as time passed.

“Guaa! W-What…Guu!”

Excruciating pain corroded his body. Hajime thrashed on the ground. This pain was so strong that it blew away his phantom limb pain.

With his trembling hands, Hajime reached into his breast pocket and took out a test-tube made of stone. He quickly chewed the edge

of the tube and drank the contents inside. The sacred water quickly went to work and the pain subsided, but a short time later the agony continued.

“Higugaa! What the…it didn’t help? Augh!”

His body started to pulsate with the pain. Thump, Thump, his body pulsed. Even the sounds could be heard coming from his body.

However the next moment, the sacred water’s healing properties started to restore his body. When it was done healing him, the pain returned. Then it was repaired again.

Even the sacred water could not stunt the effects. The tremendous healing ability was actually backfiring here.

Hajime screamed as he floundered on the ground. He banged his head repeatedly against the wall at the unending sight of his hell. Even if he wanted to die, there would be noone to grant his desire, so he had no choice but to endure it.

Changes started to form on Hajime’s body. First, his hair lost all color. Maybe because of a pain that broke his threshold, or another cause, his black Japanese hair turned white. Next, his muscles and skeleton started to thicken. Crimson lines started to emerge all over his body.

There is a phenomenon called overcompensation. This is the process the body goes through when training muscles. The muscles are broken down from the severe use and in order to compensate and adapt to the strain it creates stronger and more muscle when the body recovers. The same happens to the skeletal system. Hajime’s body was going through this phenomenon.

Demon meat was a deadly poison for humans. All of them had Magic Stones in their body, and this allowed for their wonderful physical ability with their magical power. Inside his body this magic was strongly permeating his muscles and bones.

This magic was the Special Magic that did not require the magic circles or incantation to cast, and his magic was getting altered.

This kind of alteration would be fatal to a human. From the inside of the body the poison would erode the body and destroy the cells. In the past, anyone who had consumed demon flesh was broken to pieces and died. Hajime knew of this, but his starvation had caused him to be unable to recall this knowledge.

If Hajime had just ate the demon flesh than he would have collapsed and died. However, there was an elixir that prevented that. Sacred water, it will restore immediately what once was broken. Because of this constant breaking and restoring, overcompensation, his body strengthened at an unbelievable speed.

Destroy, Repair, Destroy, then Repair. The body changed while pulsing. It looked like he was being reborn. A ceremony of birth to throw away the body's weakness,a metamorphosis. Hajime's screams was like the first cry of a newborn.

When the pulsation stopped, Hajime went limp. Pure white was his hair color now, and crimson lines formed on his body. He was just like the monsters that plagued this level.

Hajime's right hand twitched. The closed eyes were opened slightly. His unfocused eyes settled onto his right hand. Grasping his hand into a fist, he scratched along the ground. Hajime slowly clasped and unclasp his hand to prove he was still alive. When he finished checking if he had control of his body, he stood up slowly.

"…Oh, yeah. You weren't suppose to eat demon meat…I'm an idiot…but he couldn't help but eat it."

Completely exhausted, Hajime just snorted. Both his hunger and his phantom limb pain disappeared after this incident. On the contrary, his body felt strangely light and overflowed with power. Even though he just went through that, it was in its best condition. The most clearly developed muscles was his arm and abdomen. Hajime heights also increased by 10 cm, bringing the total height to 175 cm.

"What happened to my body? There is some strang feeling…"

Not only had his external body changed, but he felt something out

of place inside. The strange feeling felt cold and hot at the same time. When more of his awareness came, he focused on the crimson lines on his arm.

“Wow, how unpleasant. Makes me feel like a demon…What a joke. Oh yeah, the Status Plate!”

Exploring through his pockets, he searched for the forgotten status plate. Good thing he did not lose it. There on the plate was displayed Hajime’s current condition. Maybe it would show if something was wrong with his body.

Name Nagumo Hajime
Age 17 Years Old
Race Human Male
Class Transmutation Artist (Synergist)
Level 8
Strength 300
Vitality 300
Dexterity 300
Intelligence 300
Magic 300
Magic Resistance 300
Skills
Transmutation
Magic Manipulation
Iron Stomach
Lightning Clad
Language Comprehension

“…Say What!?”

Like always, whenever he is astonished he switches to Kansai dialect and performs a Tsukkomi. All his stats had increased significantly, and he had three new skills. He couldn’t believe it, and he was still just level 8. Levels were considered the amount of progression a person had, for Hajime, this meant he had a lot of potential to grow.

“Magic Manipulation?”

He wondered if he could directly control magic then. Hajime pondered if the earlier sensation he felt was magic. To verify his thoughts, he concentrated to attempt this “magic manipulation.” The crimson lines emerge again when Hajime concentrated on that sensation. He imagined an image where that sensation gathered

into his right hand. Slowly the sensation returned and he could feel the movement of magic.

“Whoa!”

When he attempted to raise his voice at the sensation, the magic started to gather around the magic formation on his glove. The surprised Hajime tried to transmute, and the ground rose easily.

“Seriously? I don’t need to chant? But the principle of magic said that direct manipulation of magic was impossible. Only demons could perform it. Maybe after consuming demon flesh I obtained the ability?”

Right on the dot! Hajime had for sure gotten the ability of the of the demons. He wanted to test out “Lightning Clad” next.

“How do I use it? If you mention “Lightning Clad”, it has to deal with electricity. Was it what the wolves casted with their tail?”

He tried different ways to invoke it but nothing changed. Hajime did not know how the magic felt like, so he did not know what to do. Groaning, he remembered when he learned how to transmute, and recalled that imagination was important. Magic was not just about making a magical formation, another part was the image formed.

Hajime imagined an image of static electricity crackling. On the tips of his right hands emitted an electric burst.

“Oh! It came out. Now I see. For demons, the most important part was to imagine its magic.”

After he got a hang of it, he repeated created a discharge of electricity. Unlike the wolves, he could not launch his lightning. Maybe this is why it was called “Lightning Clad”, he was able to clad his body in lightning. Practice was necessary to control the current and voltage.

Lastly, the “Iron Stomach” skill. Maybe next time he ate demon flesh, he wouldn’t be wrecked with pain. There was no food in the labyrinth. Does he take starvation or the pain? This skill can maybe

solve this question for him, and he anticipated it.

Hajime took a piece of wolf meat and fired it with lightning. After his starvation was cured, he did not want to eat raw meat. He fired it until it was brown.

Making up his mind, he swallowed it. 10 seconds…1 minute…10 minutes passed and nothing. Hajime started to grill more meat and consumed them. There wasn't any pain that assaulted him. He wondered if it was because of the skill or had he just developed a tolerance for it. Hajime did not know, but he rejoiced. With this he did not have to taste hell everytime.

Hajime ate until he was full, and decided to return to base. He finally had the possibility to beat that bear demon. Determined, he decided to work hard to develop his new skills.

Other wolves were carved for their meat. Compared to his first time with them, this time it was easy. He returned to the area with the God's Crystal and created a storage to store the carved meat with this transmuting.

* * *

A few days have passed since Hajime returned to the base, and all this time he had been training his transmuting and new skills.

Everything was going well, and all his skills were progressing well. His transmutation skill went through a change. The skill had acquired a derived skill from itself. "Mineral Appraisal" was the name of the skill. In the Royal Capital of the Kingdom, only high-ranking smiths had this skill.

Usually the magical formations needed to power appraisal magic are much bigger than the formations used for offensive magic. The facilities that could perform these huge magical formations were limited. For those that had the skill, they could easily analyze any mineral with just a chant and magic formation as long as they touch it. This derived skill was acquired by training the transmutation skill for many years, it was not an innate skill.

Hajime decided to check the neighboring minerals with his newfound skill. When a person uses the skill the description will show up on their status plate. For example,

Green Light Stone
This stone has the ability to absorb magic. Green light is produced with this saved up magic. If it is split, all the accumulated magic will be released in an instant.

What a very simple description; it did the job though. Hajime grinned and laughed as a thought came up. From here he could search for minerals to make powerful weapons that could be his trump card.

Combustion Stone
An inflammable ore. The structural component is used to fuel the combustion; continuously burning will reduce size until nothing is left. Explosion may occur if many are lit in a sealed area. Its power is equivalent to a higher level fire spell; this depends on the amount and rate of compression used in forging.

When he read the description, he felt a thought develop in his brain. This stone may play a similar role to gunpowder. If this was the case, then he could create a weapon with extreme firepower with his transmuting. Hajime was excited. There was going to be a lot of trial and error. The amount of effort needed to design it would not be small. Even though his transmuting had saved him many times before, it still lacked a real means of attack; the idea that he would get a real weapon had him rejoicing.

Ten days have passed since he ate the wolf, and finally he had succeeded producing his project.

With an attack that could exceed the speed of sound for a short distance, it was a modern weapon with great firepower. Overall length was 35 cm, it had a revolving magazine that held 6 bullets made from Tauru Ore; the hardest known ore in this area. The barrel was elongated. Bullets were made using Tauru Ore as the projectile and compressed powdered Combustion Stone was the propellant. Oversized revolver would accurately describe the firearm. Combustion Stone was not the only explosive to propel the

bullet. Using his “Lightning Clad” skill, he could produce electromagnetic force to help accelerate the bullet; like a small rail gun. This equated to a power that was 10 times stronger than an anti-matter rifle. He called it “Donner”. Hajime wanted to have a partner to rely on.

“I did it! With this I will be able to deal with that monster!”

Hajime had designed “Donner” using modern firearms as the model: he looked at his masterpiece and laughed slightly. This world’s craftsmen only knew how to make a good sword or armor. Right now, a new weapon has been created in this world that was ruled by swords and magic.

* * *

Tauru Ore
Hard black ore. Hardness 8 (On a scale of 10 being the hardest). Resistant to impact and heat. Vulnerable to cold. Becomes fragile if cooled. Binds if heated.